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ESSAY

ON THE SUBJECT PROPOSED BY THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, VIZ :

TO

INVESTIGATE THE AUTHENTICITY

OF

THE POEMS OF OSSIAN,

BOTH

AS GIVEN IN MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION,

AND

AS PUBLISHED IN GAELIC, LONDON, 1807,

UNDER THE SANCTION OF THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF LONDON ;

AND

ON THE SUPPOSITION OF SUCH POEMS NOT BEING OF RECENT ORIGIN,  
TO ASSIGN THE PROBABLE ERA AND COUNTRY OF THE ORIGINAL POET OR POETS.

A PRIZE ESSAY.

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BY WILLIAM HAMILTON DRUMMOND, D.D. M.R.I.A.

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# CONTENTS.

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	PAGE.
SECTION <i>First</i> .—Historic View of the Rise and Progress of the Ossianic Controversy, ....	3
<i>Second</i> .—Macpherson's Ossian compared with the new Translation of the pretended Gaelic version, ...	32
<i>Third</i> .—On the Imitations in Macpherson's Ossian, ....	56
<i>Fourth</i> .—Of the Argument founded on the Excellence of the Poetry, ....	75
<i>Fifth</i> .—On the Language of Ossian, ....	97
<i>Sixth</i> .—On the probable Era and Origin of the Poems attributed to Ossian, ....	114
<i>Seventh</i> .— <i>Fin Mac-Cumhal</i> and <i>Oisin</i> were natives of Ireland, not of Scotland, ....	127
<i>Eighth</i> .—On the Topography of Ossian's Poems, ....	143
<i>Ninth</i> .—On the Era of Ossian, ....	153





# **POLITE LITERATURE.**



*Subject proposed by the Royal Irish Academy—To investigate the authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, both as given in Macpherson's translation, and as published in Gaelic, London 1807, under the sanction of the Highland Society of London; and on the supposition of such Poems not being of recent origin, to assign the probable era and country of the original poet or poets. A Prize Essay, by WILLIAM HAMILTON DRUMMOND, D. D. M. R. I. A.*

Read May 25, 1829.

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## SECTION I.

### *Historic View of the Rise and Progress of the Ossianic Controversy.*

“Pudet in talibus ineptiis (Macphersonii scilicet) refellendis immorari.”

O'CONOR, Hib. Script. Proleg. xii.

THAT the subject of inquiry proposed by the Royal Irish Academy, relative to the authenticity of Ossian's Poems, may be pursued with most advantage, it is deemed expedient to commence with an historic view of the rise and progress of the Ossianic controversy.

We learn from the Report of the Highland Society of Scotland, drawn up by Henry Mackenzie, Esq. and published in Edinburgh, 1805; that Jerome Stone of Dunkeld was the first who made any collection of the ancient poems of the Highlands. Of one of these poems he published a translation in the Scots Magazine, for January 1756, accompanied with a letter stating that those who have any



tolerable acquaintance with the Irish language, must know that there are a great many poetical compositions in it, and that they are tender, simple, and sublime. The specimen which he published, was entitled “Bas Fhraoich, or the Death of Fraoch, who was destroyed by the treacherous passion of his Mother-in-law.” The original, with two translations, the one in loose paraphrastic rhymes, the other, close and literal, may be seen in the VIIth No. of the Highland Report. Neither in the poem nor in the letter, is any mention made of Fingal or Ossian.

“About the same time, Mr. Pope, minister of Reay, in Caithness, well known for his abilities as a scholar, and his great knowledge of the Gaelic language, had thoughts of making a collection of the ancient poetry of the Highlands, in concert with another gentleman,”\* whose death put an end to the scheme. They wrote some poems, “said to be composed by Ossian,” from oral tradition, “but could not, from the best information, learn that there was any manuscript of them in that part of the kingdom.” On the publication of Macpherson’s work, Mr. Pope recollected that he had heard some fragments of Lathmon, and found that the Erragon of Temora is called Dibird fii, and the poem which mentions the death of Oscar, Ca Gaur, in the Gaelic of the Highlands.†

In June 1760, Mr. James Macpherson published, at Edinburgh, his “Fragments of Ancient Poetry, collected in the Highlands, and translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language.” These fragments were fifteen in number, and formed the first specimen of the celebrated poems attributed to Ossian.‡

On the appearance of these poems, the literary world was astonished. A new sun had blazed forth in the hemisphere, and all eyes

\* Report of the Highland Society, p. 25.

† Id. Appendix, 53.

‡ Ritchie’s Life of Hume, p. 137.

were raised to admire, and all hearts were ready to pay homage to the splendid phenomenon. Scotland in particular was delighted. She flattered herself that now she had a poet who would rival Homer, and it became a point of national honour to laud and magnify his various beauties. We learn from a letter of Hume's, that every one was persuaded of his authenticity, that philosophers and men of letters, the celebrated Adam Smith, and the Laird of Mac-Farlane, the greatest antiquary in Scotland, and Major Mackay, Lord Rae's brother, and the Laird and the Lady Macleod, to say nothing of names of inferior note, were all of one sentiment on the subject. It was now discovered, that in the Highlands every body could repeat the poems in the original, that the names of Fingal and Ossian, and Oscar and Dermid, were as common to the mountaineers of Scotland, as Cæsar and Pompey to the old citizens of Rome, insomuch, that their favourite mastiffs were designated by those heroic appellations.\* The happy translator, who had experienced how hard it is "to climb the slippery steep of fame," now found himself transported, as by a sudden bound, to its highest elevation. A liberal subscription was commenced among the patrons of genius in Edinburgh, to reward his labours, and enable him to make a tour to the Highlands, to discover more poetical treasures. In that tour he fulfilled the object of his mission, and in the commencement of the ensuing year, published in London a new and enlarged edition of the poems, which seems to have obtained an extensive circulation, and added much to his celebrity. Blair, the distinguished divine and professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, became, through the influence of Home, the well-known author of the Tragedy of Douglas, their zealous and decided advocate.

\* Lord Kaimes says that Luath and Bran, the names of Fingal's dogs, were the appellations still retained.

To fix their fame on a stable basis, he exerted all his ingenuity, and produced a dissertation on their authenticity, which is eulogized by Hill, his biographer, as “combining the subtilty of Aristotle with the elegance of Longinus.”\* In this dissertation, he founds his principal argument on internal evidence ; but not contented with this, he proposed to accompany it with certain documents corroborative of his reasoning, and, accordingly, wrote to Hume, in London, for his opinion as to the nature of the evidence which he should endeavour to obtain. Hume candidly replied, that he often heard the poems rejected with disdain and indignation as a palpable and most impudent forgery ; that he foresaw, if they were left to stand on their present footing, they would soon fall into final oblivion ; that for his own part, he had many particular reasons to believe the poems genuine, more than it was possible for any Englishman to have, yet, he was not without scruples ; that the *manners*, notwithstanding all the art with which Blair had endeavoured to *varnish* them, formed a strong reason against them ; that the preservation of such long and such connected poems, by oral tradition alone, during a course of fourteen centuries, is so much out of the course of human affairs, that it requires the strongest reason to make us believe it ; that the capital point should be established, not that the poems are so ancient as the age of Severus, but that they were not forged within the five preceding years by James Macpherson ; that the proofs must not be arguments but testimonies ; that the fact should be ascertained whether, as Macpherson pretended, a manuscript of great part of Fingal, did actually exist in the family of Clanranald.

With this advice of his sagacious philosophic friend, Blair seemed desirous to comply. He wrote to the Highlands, and received letters,

\* Hill's Account of the Life and Writings of Hugh Blair, D. D. Edin. 1807, pp. 39-40.



setting forth what the writers, chiefly clergymen, knew of the matter.\* He published the result in an appendix to the dissertation, but the original still remained in obscurity. He ascertained no fact, and found no document sufficient to answer the demands, or satisfy the doubts of such sceptics as Hume.

Macpherson soon found that he would not be suffered to sit down unmolested under the shade of his laurels. Notwithstanding the popular feeling and national partiality in favour of his work, many began to entertain the same scruples as Hume. All wondered how poems of such length could have been preserved by oral tradition in a rude country, and through a long series of dark and barbarous ages. A consideration of the changes to which all languages are subject, even when bound by the strictest chains of syntax and orthography, naturally created a suspicion that "the whole truth" had not been divulged. Moreover, *the manners* which they described were so contrary to men's previous ideas on the subject, and they presented a state of society so different from that of the heroic ages of every other country, that they corroborated such suspicions. Notwithstanding the varnish of Blair, and the patriotic industry of Lord Kaims, to prove that "the manners were Caledonian, and not pure fiction," doubts rose upon doubts. The timid whisper swelled into bold vociferation; and the dread sounds of forgery and imposition were reverberated from the metropolis of England to the mountains of Caledonia. The luminous shafts of criticism flew thick and fast through the poetic mists of Fingal and Temora. The ghosts of Morven were heard to shriek in their airy halls, and the spirit of Loda trembled in fear of utter dissolution.

Foremost in the van of Macpherson's opponents, stood the

\* Highland Report.

learned Doctor Samuel Johnson. In his *Tour to the Western Isles*, published in 1774, he has discussed the subject of Ossian with a strength of reasoning, which nothing but the clearest demonstration of opposing facts can ever set aside. By a force of mental compression, which was eminently his own, he has condensed into a few sentences the sum of almost all that can be adduced against the authenticity of Macpherson's Ossian. "I believe," says he, "that the poems of Ossian never existed in any other form than that in which we have seen them. The editor, or author, never could shew the original, nor can it be shewn by any other. To revenge rational incredulity by refusing evidence, is a degree of insolence with which the world is not yet acquainted, and stubborn audacity is the last refuge of guilt. It would be easy to shew it if he had it; but whence could it be had? It is too long to be remembered, and the language formerly had nothing written. He has, doubtless, inserted names that circulated in popular stories, and may have translated some wandering ballads, if any can be found; and the names and some of the images being recollected, make an inaccurate auditor imagine, with the help of some Caledonian bigotry, that he has formerly heard the whole."

If Macpherson had answered these weighty objections satisfactorily, he would have ended the dispute, and established his own reputation. But being of the *irritabile genus*, or, as Hume calls him, a "heteroclite mortal," one who thought, perhaps, that his genius should stamp authority on his words, and set him above the critic's scrutiny or suspicion, instead of vindicating his character and adducing his proofs, he thought fit to proceed by a more summary way, and threatened the critic whom he could not confute. He wrote an insolent letter to Johnson, and was answered in the following "rough phrase of stern defiance:"\*

\* Murphy's Essay on the Life and Genius of Doctor Johnson.

MR. JAMES MACPHERSON,

I have received your foolish and impudent letter. Any violence that shall be attempted upon me, I will do my best to repel; and what I cannot do for myself, the law shall do for me; for I will not be hindered from exposing what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian. What would you have me retract? I thought your work an imposture; I think so still; and for my opinion, I have given reasons which I here dare you to refute. Your abilities, since your Homer, are not so formidable; and what I hear of your morality, inclines me to credit rather what you shall prove, than what you shall say.

S. JOHNSON.

Finding that the redoubtable critic was no more to be intimidated than Cuchullin of spears, or the car-borne king of woody Morven, Macpherson became convinced that his Ossianic mode of deciding the controversy would be attended by no success. Casting off the buskin, and descending from his Iambics, he caused the following advertisement, in the name of his bookseller, to be edited in some of the public journals: "that during six weeks after the first publication of the poems, the original manuscript lay at his shop, for the inspection of the curious."

(Signed)

"T. BECKET."

Shaw affirms that this MS. was never seen; that he had no MS. to deposit with Becket, unless some Irish one, in which, had an Irish gentleman gone to inspect it, he might have found the genealogy of his own family. For, he adds, "it is well known that the Earse dialect of the Gaelic was never written nor printed until Mr. Mac-Farlane,



late minister of Killinivir, in Argyleshire, published in 1754 a translation of *Barter's Call to the Unconverted*.\*

Shaw's conjecture, that he had an Irish MS. which he may have sometimes shewn, is strongly corroborated by Johnson's declaration, that the editor has been heard to say, that part of the poem has been received by him in the Saxon character. The Irish character having some resemblance to the Saxon, may have led him, from ignorance, to conclude, that it was the latter; unconscious how such a conclusion would expose him to the caustic observation of the critic, that "he had then found, by some peculiar fortune, an unwritten language, written in a character which the natives probably never beheld."

In 1781, Shaw, the author of a Gaelic Grammar and Dictionary, published an inquiry into the authenticity of the poems ascribed to Ossian. He wrote in a bold popular style, and having evinced himself to be a master of the Gaelic language, his opinions were calculated to have no small influence in the contest. He stood boldly forth as "a sturdy moralist, who loved truth better than Scotland," and wrote with the earnestness of one conscious of the truth for which he was contending. He coincided in Doctor Johnson's arguments, and added to them all the weight of his authority derived from his knowledge of the history, language, and customs of the Highlands, as well as from having travelled through them, for the express purpose of gleaning information relative to the question in dispute. "Many mountains," says he, "I traversed, many valleys I explored, and into many humble cottages I crept on all four, to interrogate their inhabitants. I wandered from island to island, wet, fatigued, and uncomfortable. No labour I thought too much, no expense too great, while I flattered myself with converting the disbelieving Doctor

\* Shaw's Inquiry, pp. 26-27.



Johnson, recovering some of the poetry of Ossian, and stripping Mr. Macpherson's brow of what I then used to call them, 'stolen bays;' for I then believed there might be an original, and that he rather wished to appear the *author* than the *translator*." He was frequently engaged in long discourses with the blind, the lame, and the aged; "but I found myself," he proceeds, "not a little mortified, when all they could repeat was nothing but a few fabulous and marvellous verses or stories concerning Fionn Mac-Cumhal, alias Fingal; his Fiona or followers chasing each other from island to island, striding from mountain to mountain, or crossing a frith at a hop, with the help of his spear. There was much of enchantments, fairies, goblins, incantation rhymes, and the second sight. When I heard those of one country I heard all, for they all repeated in general the same stories; and when I had the narration of a few, I had every thing."

Having no success in the way of oral communication, he turned his attention to the discovery of manuscripts. And here his inquiries, as he expected, for he knew that the Erse was never written, proved equally unsuccessful. He was told of one person who had a manuscript; but that person referred him to a second, and the second to a third, and the third to the first again, till having gone round the circle, he was at length told that Macpherson had carried them all to London. He found, indeed, in the possession of Mr. Macintyre, of Glenace, Argyleshire, a parchment manuscript of Irish genealogy, written in the Irish character, dialect, and contraction. It was shewn to him as containing the object of his search; but after much difficulty in decyphering it, he saw that it did not contain a line of Ossian's poetry. "Having made this fruitless inquiry," he continues, "after the *genuine Ossian's poetry*, from which I only learned there never had been any, I passed over to Ireland, there also to pursue Ossian, and other inquiries. I rummaged, with the consent of Doctor Leland,

Trinity College library, examined manuscripts, had different persons who understood the character and language, in pay, conversed with all who might know any thing of the matter; and, after all, could discover no such poetry as Macpherson's; but that the Irish had been more careful than the Highlanders, and had committed to writing even those *compositions of the fifteenth century*."

An attack so bold and vigorous as Shaw's, if not repelled, must have proved decisive. The honour of Scotland was in jeopardy, and a champion arose in its defence. This was Mr. John Clarke, anonymous editor of "The Works of the Caledonian Bards," published in 1778, containing various epic, elegiac, and pastoral compositions of other Highland bards, different from those of Ossian. We learn from the Abbe Cesarotti, that he was a young Highlander of genius and understanding, and thoroughly acquainted with the Gaelic, which was his vernacular tongue. The poems which he published, though ancient, were far inferior, he acknowledged, to those of Macpherson. For the authenticity of these he strenuously contended, and wrote against Shaw in a spirit of acrimonious invective; representing him as "unprincipled, selfish, revengeful, ungrateful towards his best friends, a flatterer of Johnson; and above all, an impostor and bare-faced slanderer, who was at perpetual contradiction with himself and truth."\* As Shaw, when he put forth his first publication, entitled "An Analysis of the Gaelic language," had been a strenuous defender of the authenticity of Ossian, Clarke makes a dexterous use of the arguments employed in that work; and in a part of his answer, called "Shaw against Shaw," convicts him of inconsistency, and thus endeavours to neutralize his conclusions. Such inconsistency, however, as may be fairly contended, was only a proof of Shaw's candour. In giving up

\* Cesarotti's Dissertation, published with Ossian's Poems, in the original Gaelic, by Sir John Sinclair, Bart. vol. iii. p. 317.

his former prepossessions, and yielding to the force of truth, he acted as became a philosophic mind. It is not without weighty reasons that a man deserts or opposes the cause which he has once espoused, especially if it be popular, favourable to his interests, or gratifying to his national vanity. Shaw, in his inquiry, seems conscious that he would expose himself to much bitter animadversion; and says, "if I have the approbation of the sensible, liberal, and discerning part of my countrymen, I shall feel little anxiety from the apprehension of the malignant virulence and personalities that may issue from the illiberal few. I never yet could dissemble, nor personate a hypocrite; *truth* has always been *dearer* to *me* than my country; nor shall I ever support an ideal national honour, founded on an imposture, though it were to my hindrance," (p. 72.) And again: "I should be as happy as any of my countrymen can be, to have it in my power to produce the original, and to satisfy the world; but, as not one line of it has hitherto been seen, but what Mr. Macpherson has favoured us with, imposed as a specimen, though *actually translated from the original ENGLISH*; I am so far a friend to truth, that I cannot permit an imposition to descend to posterity undetected. Had I been ignorant of the Gaelic, less credit might be expected to my narration of facts; but having written a Grammatical Analysis and Dictionary of it, it may be readily believed I should rejoice to have it in my power to produce the originals of these poems to the public, as the Dictionary and Grammar might, perhaps, be sought after, to help the curious in forming some opinion of the original. Thus, it would be my interest to support the authenticity, did I think it honest," (pp. 102, 104.)

This is surely the language of honesty and truth. No man can write in a style like this, from any principle but conviction. In an appendix to the second edition of his "Inquiry," Shaw replies to Clarke. He "rests the strength of his arguments on the mysterious



conduct of Macpherson, in withholding from the public the Gaelic originals,"\* and says candidly, "if Fingal exists in Gaelic, let it be shewn; and if ever the originals can be shewn, opposition may be silenced."

Another powerful auxiliary to the cause of Macpherson appeared in 1780, in a work of Mr. John Smith, minister at Kilbrandon, Argyleshire. This work is entitled "Gaelic Antiquities, consisting of a History of the Druids, particularly of those of Caledonia; a Dissertation on the authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, and a collection of ancient Poems translated from the Gaelic of Ullin, Ossian, Orran, and others. This was followed in 1787 by the publication of *Sean Dana; le Oisian, Orran, Ullann, &c.*, ancient poems collected in the western Highlands and isles, being the originals of the translations published some time ago in the *Gaelic Antiquities*, by John Smith, D.D., minister of the Gospel at Campbelton." This collection consists of fifteen poems, eleven of which are ascribed to Ossian, the rest to three of the most celebrated of his contemporary bards. Smith follows close in the wake of Blair, whose arguments from internal evidence, he repeats. He thinks the prevalence of the bardic institutions will account for the preservation of the poems through so many ages.

In 1783, Thomas Hill, an English gentleman, published a small work, containing several Gaelic songs and poems, collected during a tour through the Highlands of Scotland in 1780, but they were mostly of that class which Macpherson and Smith would have rejected. This was unfortunate. Had he been so lucky as to stumble on an ancient copy of the real Ossian, how he would have been enriched!

As it became the fashion to admire Ossian, it also became fashionable to make collections of Ossianic poems. Foreigners caught the

\* Sir John Sinclair's *Ossian*, iii. 351.

infection, translations were made, and foreign presses took an interest in multiplying copies. We learn from the notes to the Abbe Cesarotti's Dissertation, that "in 1787 the Baron Edmund De Harold, colonel in the service of the Elector Palatine, published at Dusseldorf an English version of seventeen little Caledonian poems, which he had discovered, with the following titles: The Songs of Tara; The Song of Phelim; Evirallen; Sulmora; Ryno's Song on the Death of Oscar; Malvina, a dramatic poem; Rinfena and Sira; A song of Ossian after the defeat of the Romans; Bosmina; The Songs of Comfort; The Last Song of Ossian; Sulima; Sitric; Lamor; Larnul, or the Song of Despair; The Death of Asala; The Morning Song of the Bard Dlorah." All these poems the Baron ascribed to Ossian, except that of Lamor, which is supposed to be *of more remote antiquity*; and that of Sitric, which appears to be of the ninth century. Of these poems it is observed, that "the style is neither so figurative nor so bold as in those published by Macpherson. In Ossian's Poems no mention is to be found of any deity, while those translated by the Baron, on the contrary, are filled with the most sublime descriptions of the supreme Being. Macpherson's Ossian appears to have been a native of the Highlands of Scotland; and De Harold's Ossian seems to be a native of Ireland."

Ireland, it may be supposed, was not an uninterested spectator of these transactions. Till now her claim to the Fenian bards and heroes had no more been disputed, than her claim to Brian Boroimhe and his bard Mac-Liag. She heard with amazement of the usurpation of her right, in favour of the Gael Albanach. Her renowned chief, Fin Mac-Cumhal, the general of one of her ancient kings, had undergone a metamorphosis beneath the spells of a sorcerer, called Macpherson, almost as great as that which he suffered from the incantations of the daughter of Gullen.\* The Fenian chief was become

\* See the Irish Poem of The Chase.

the king of woody Morven, an obscure district in Argyleshire, the name of which, till now, had never been heard beyond its own limits. Her pride was alarmed, her history falsified, her literary glory threatened with extinction ; and though fully aware of the invalidity and falsehood of all rival claims, she was not at the instant prepared to confute them. The sudden and unexpected invasion surprised, but did not rob her either of the courage or the weapons by which it could be successfully repelled.

A short time after Macpherson's first publication of Ossian, while he was in London, passing a second edition through the press, an advertisement appeared in the *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, announcing the speedy publication of Fingal, "a poem originally wrote in the Irish or Erse language, and stating that the translation would set forth all the blunders and absurdities in the edition now printing in London." This gave Macpherson apparently just room to complain, "that a gentleman in Dublin accused him to the public of committing blunders and absurdities in translating the language of his own country, and that before any translation of his appeared." The last clause of the complaint was untrue, for his translation had appeared in Edinburgh in June of the preceding year. But as no poem of the name of Fingal is known to exist in the Irish language, no Irish gentleman could have thought of making such an announcement. Theophilus O'Flanagan, Secretary of the Gaelic Society of Dublin, accuses Macpherson of having himself inserted that advertisement ; and the charge is, in all probability, well founded. Such an artifice accords with the disingenuousness of his whole character, and no doubt, it rendered good service to his cause in exciting public attention, and creating a belief that an Irish original did actually exist.

But nothing is more difficult than to carry on such a literary imposition long, without some untoward circumstance awakening suspi-



cion and leading to detection. Macpherson, with a temerity which experience afterwards taught him to correct, published some lines of the original of *Temora*, stating, that "*the words are not, after the Irish manner, bristled over with unnecessary quiescent consonants so disagreeable to the eye, and which rather embarrass than assist the reader.*" General Vallancey, who had studied the Gaelic with such accuracy, as enabled him to publish a valuable grammar of the Irish language, was forcibly struck by these extraordinary observations so contrary to the experience of every Celtic scholar. The corruption of the Celtic in that single specimen, consisting of only twelve lines, afforded, in his opinion, "a striking proof of the novelty of the poem, or, if it be ancient, it is a proof," says he, "of the unlettered ignorance of the ancient Gaelic Scots." This he illustrates by example, and adds, "if we were to criticise on every corrupt word in the twelve lines, it would require many pages." Such observations from a man of so much knowledge in Celtic learning as Vallancey, confirmed Shaw in what he says he always believed, that the specimen given by Macpherson, was *his own translation from the original English*.†

The well-founded opinion of Vallancey was amply corroborated by the investigation of succeeding writers. In 1775 appeared "*The Ogygia Vindicated*," a posthumous work of O'Flaherty's, published by C. O'Connor, Esq. The editor, in his preface, remarks, that Macpherson "forgot to prove how those poems could, through a series of more than a thousand years, be preserved among an illiterate people; or how mere *oral* tradition, which taints every other human composition, and corrupts its stream as it flows, should prove a salt for keeping the works of *Ossian* sweet in their primitive purity. He forgot also to assign a reason how that illiterate bard should be so descriptive of arts and customs unknown in his own age, and so silent of the rites

\* Shaw's Inquiry, p. 34.

and customs which prevailed in it. He may, perhaps, find it easy to give such problems a solution by referring to the inspiration of the ancient poets, who could foretel the future, and explain to their hearers what otherwise they could not understand. But we conceive that every critical reader will give a quite different solution, and not spare a moment for hesitation in pronouncing those poems mere modern compositions, collected *by the industry*, and shaped into form *by the interpolations* of the ingenious editor," pp. xiii. xiv.

In the summer of 1784 Doctor Young, F. T. C. D. M. R. I. A. and afterwards Bishop of Clonfert, made a tour to the Highlands of Scotland, with the express view of collecting ancient Gaelic poems, and ascertaining, as far as possible, from what materials Macpherson had fabricated his Ossian. The result is published in the first volume of the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy. He accuses Macpherson of having altered the dates of his originals, which appear to be the Irish Fenian Tales, of giving them a much higher antiquity than belongs to them, of suppressing the name of Saint Patrick, and altering both the form and the matter. He tells us that Mr. M'Arthur, minister of Mull, in reply to some inquiries of one of the Professors in the University of Glasgow, wrote to him that there were many spurious Irish songs wandering through the country, but to satisfy his scruples, he sent him four fragments extracted from the genuine poems of Ossian. The first and second of these specimens of the *genuine Ossian*, were found by Doctor Young to be extracted from an Irish poem, of which there is a beautiful copy in the Library of the University of Dublin, entitled *Laoi Mhanuis Mhoir*. The third is taken from the *Marbhrann Oscair*; and the fourth from the poem of *Óran eadar Ailte agus do Maronnan*, of which also there is a copy in the Dublin University. "It appears, therefore, that those spurious Irish ballads, as they are called by Macpherson and M'Arthur, are the very originals of which the former compiled his Ossian."

Doctor Young was much surprised to find that out of so large a work as *Temora*, *Fingal*, and all the other shorter poems, M'Arthur should happen to select only such passages as occurred in the Erse songs that fell into Mr. Hill's hands or his own. "This," he observes, "seems to indicate, that the foundation of Macpherson's *Ossian* is much narrower than, perhaps, we might have suspected."

In comparing the Irish copies with the Scotch fragments, and the poems published in 1786, in Gillies's Perth edition of *Gaelic Poems*, he found that the most perverse industry had been employed to corrupt and falsify the genuine Irish text, to make it accord with Macpherson's fabrications. The name of Saint Patrick, though of frequent occurrence in the Irish, was carefully excluded from the Scotch copies, because the era of the saint did not synchronise with that of *Ossian*. The name of Manus was also excluded, and another substituted, for a similar reason; and all such passages as represented Fin and *Ossian* to be natives of Ireland, were carefully expunged, to make room for a version favourable to the new hypothesis.\* Every thing was done which it was possible to effect by suppression, addition, and falsification, to give plausibility and currency to the grand imposition.

"Talibus insidiis perjuriq[ue] arte Sinon[is],  
Credita res."

VIRG.

Doctor Campbell, in his "*Strictures on the Ecclesiastical and Literary History of Ireland*," published in 1789, follows in the same strain as Doctor Young, whom he eulogizes as a writer whose "mind,

\* "*Ex uno disce omnes.*" In the combat of CON, son of DARGO, and GAUL, son of MORNE, the messenger of FIN is made to say, "*For what cause have you come into IRELAND?*" But in the Perth edition it is changed into (*the Gaelic of*) "*For what cause have you come into THIS COUNTRY?*"



during his whole course of inquiry, appears divested of prepossessions, and guided only by the love of truth. In his publication nothing is strained, nothing distorted; his facts are collected with philosophical calmness, and his deductions drawn with mathematical precision."

But notwithstanding the whole mass of Irish authority, historical, antiquarian, and critical, was so unhesitating, so unanimous, and so decisive, the question still continued to be agitated. Grave English and Scottish writers suffered themselves to be deceived, and the stream of history was in some danger of being polluted by the lees of Ossianic fiction. Not only did critics like Blair and Kames delude themselves and others, but professed historians began to appeal to Macpherson's Ossian as to authentic historical documents. Whitaker, in his *History of Manchester*, published in London, 1773, says of those poems, that "they carry in themselves sufficient proofs of their authenticity;"\* and acting on this conviction, weaves part of his historic web with the spider-thread woof of Caledonian fancy. "The last considerable attempt," as he obligingly informs us, "to reduce the Caledonians, was made by the Roman Emperor in person, by Severus, and the collected power of the empire under him. And they were then subject to Fingal, the Vind-Gall or head of the Britons, the son of Comhall, the grandson of Trathal, and the great grandson of Trenmor, a dictator fit to be the antagonist of Severus, and a chief worthy to be the hero of Ossian."† Henry, also, who wrote the *History of England*, expresses himself a sound believer in the authenticity of Ossian, and illustrates the subject of the early poetry of the Britons at great length, by copious extracts from Macpherson's *Ossian's Poems*, as if they were all genuine!‡ But Irish writers, who had access to the real sources of Irish history and antiquities, were not thus deceived. They detected and exposed the novel theories which had

\* Vol. i. p. 24.

† Vol. ii. p. 214.

‡ Henry's *England*, book i. c. 5.

been presented to the public. In the preliminary matter of a learned work, to which reference has been already made, "*The Ogygia Vindicated*," the author animadverts with just severity, not only on the blundering inventions of the poet Macpherson, but on the historical "*inconsistencies, contradictions, and impositions*," of his friend and coadjutor Doctor Macpherson, author of certain fabulous "*critical Dissertations on the origin, &c. of the ancient Caledonians*," which endeavour to subvert some of the most clearly attested facts in our early annals. Wynne, also, in his *History of Ireland*, (published in 1773,) speaking of Whitaker, says, that so far from his account of "Fingal, sovereign of Morven, and chief of the Caledonians, bearing any token of the genuine Irish History, it has scarcely the resemblance necessary to work up the circumstances into a drama. If some of our northern neighbours took it into their heads to reverse the chronicles of Ireland, in order to make poems out of them, in support of their own particular prejudices, there is surely no occasion for our grave historians to follow in their footsteps, and to insist, that, without any one real superior advantage over their neighbours, these Caledonians should know the history of that country better than its inhabitants, who profess to have kept its records for many succeeding ages." But a Scotch avenger of insulted historic truth arose in Pinkerton, a writer of pith and marrow, who did not hesitate to give his sentiments all that energy of expression which he could well command, and expose to merited reprobation, the attempts which had been made to overthrow, by shallow arguments, the positive testimonies of Claudian, Orosius, Isidorus, Gildas, and Bede.\* "God knows," says he, "our antiquities were too

\* Pinkerton's Essay on the Origin of Scotch Poetry.

Macpherson says, in his *Introduction to the History of Great Britain and Ireland*, that he rejects the testimony of Ossian; but, replies Pinkerton, "it is as false as if it rested on it. To say of his *Introduction*, that it "teems with every error which a man can fall into, who

obscure before, without having an additional weight of nonsense thrown around them. To ascribe poetry or romance to any age, though written by ourselves, is an innocent deceit; but to connect such writings with ancient history, nay, to pretend to alter and correct ancient history by them, is so strange a breach of modesty, that I know not what to call it, no similar instance occurring in the annals of literature. Mr. Macpherson's learning is very ill digested, as Mr. Whitaker has shewn the public; yet, with all his ignorance of the ancient state of his own country, he has misled many. Doctor Henry, a Dutch compiler, though without Dutch learning, and Mr. Whitaker, a French visionary, though without French vivacity, may shake hands and congratulate one another on the solemn occasion."

In 1804 appeared Laing's History of Scotland, with a Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian annexed. In this Dissertation the author has entered so fully into the subject, with such learning, taste, and discrimination, as to have left little to be done by succeeding critics. He exposes many of Macpherson's numberless errors, and dwells with great success on his imitations of Virgil and Homer, of the Sacred Scriptures, and several of the English and Scotch poets. He proves clearly from Macpherson's own admissions, that he had no original, and that it was "the *shame* of being known only as a translator, that kept him from publishing the fragments" from which his work was constructed. "Such an idea," Laing justly observes, "could have occurred only to a person conscious that the poems were

writes upon a subject without any knowledge of it, is not the greatest charge against that production. It also abounds *with direct misquotations, in order to mislead.* \* \* \* \* He says his theory is *new*, and he ought to have known that, of course, it is *false*. It would be quite *new* to assert that Xerxes never existed, and for this we have only history, as well as for the origin of the Scots."



his own, not to a genuine translator, like Pope | Dryden, but to one unwilling to forfeit by a pretended translation, all claim to his own productions, or to the conscious merit of an original poet."

This work of Laing's was afterwards followed by the publication of an edition of Ossian's Poems, with notes pointing out more particularly the sources from which Macpherson had replenished his poetical urn.

It might be supposed that such able exposures as these would have brought the question to a conclusion, and afforded truth a triumph in the complete extinction of all further belief in the authenticity of the Scotch Ossian. But some were still found, and the race is not yet extinct, who remained obstinately attached to their first opinion, so hard is it to eradicate established error, or expel a favourite prepossession.

In 1805 was published the Report of the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland, appointed to inquire into the nature and authenticity of the Poems of Ossian. This report was drawn up by Henry Mackenzie, Esq. with considerable clearness and apparent impartiality. The report is accompanied with a copious appendix, containing letters addressed to Doctor Blair and Mr. Mackenzie, from various persons in the Highlands, with affidavits and declarations, and specimens of Gaelic poems both original and translated. This work was followed in 1807 by an "Essay on the Authenticity of Ossian's Poems, in which the objections of Malcolm Laing, Esq. are particularly considered and refuted by Patrick Graham, D. D., minister of Aberfoyle. To which is added, an Essay on the Mythology of Ossian's Poems, by Professor Richardson, of Glasgow College." In this work the author pronounces a handsome eulogy on the Highland Society, and lauds it for declining to enter into the argument, and maintaining a becoming reserve. "Anxious only to

collect facts, it has been little solicitous to offer opinions, or to enter into controversial discussion.”\* For its anxiety to collect facts, the Society merits the praise of its panegyrist. Facts are always valuable. Give us these and we shall draw our own conclusions. Again, he says, “the Committee has thought it *beneath its dignity*, to stoop to the refutation of the arguments of Mr. Laing.” Now we really cannot conceive that the Committee would have suffered any loss of dignity by refuting Mr. Laing. He was an adversary worthy of being overcome. He was their own countryman, a gentleman, a scholar, a member of Parliament, and an excellent historian. We rather think the Committee would have gained more dignity by vanquishing him, if they were able, in an honourable conflict, than by exposing themselves to the ironically sarcastic charge of having “been very laudably employed in collating one forgery with another, and giving their sanction to a very gross fabrication.”† But the task which the Highland Committee could not condescend to undertake, was, it seems, not beneath the dignity of Doctor Graham. Accordingly he has set forth in an ostentatious title, that he has *refuted* Malcolm Laing, Esq., but whether to any one’s satisfaction, except his own, may well be questioned. As for “the sum of Doctor Johnson’s argument on this occasion, he deems it of too small amount to require any particular notice!”‡

In 1807 came forth, in three splendid volumes, “*The Poems of Ossian in the original Gaelic, with a literal translation into Latin, by the late Robert Macfarlane, A. M.; together with a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems, by Sir John Sinclair, Bart.; and a translation from the Italian of the Abbè Cesarotti’s Dissertation on*

\* Introduction, p. 12.

† Laing’s Preface.

‡ Id. p. 13.

§ Graham’s Essay, Introduction, p. ix.

*the Controversy, respecting the authenticity of Ossian, with notes ; and a Supplemental Essay, by John M'Arthur, L.L.D. ; published under the sanction of the Highland Society of London.*" This work seems intended to supersede the necessity of all further publication on the subject. Sir John Sinclair appears to think that it will fully confute all the objections by which the authenticity of the poems ever has been, or ever will be opposed. We have come to a different conclusion. We are of opinion that such a work alone was wanting to confirm our objections, and that it has supplied additional proofs of the imposition.

The principal evidence on which Sir John rests his cause, is, that "a manuscript of Ossian in Gaelic, actually existed at Douay, in Flanders, previous to Mr. Macpherson's having made any collection of those poems." Influenced by a laudable desire to arrive at the truth, and having heard that the Roman Catholic Bishop, Cameron, resident in Edinburgh, could give useful information on the subject, he opened a correspondence with him, and learned the following facts: 1st, That the Rev. John Farquharson, when a missionary in Strathglass, in the Highlands of Scotland, collected about the year 1745, a number of Gaelic Poems, which were called by him Ossian's Poems, and which he affirmed were not inferior to Virgil or Homer ; 2nd, and 3rd, That the said MS. collection was left by him, first at the College of Douay, then at Dinant, and lastly at Douay again, among his own countrymen there resident ; 4th, That it was written on large folio paper ; 5th, That it was at Douay in 1777, when Bishop Chisholm left that place, but that it was then much damaged, and became so much neglected, that the leaves were torn out, and were used, so long as they lasted, to light the fire ; 6th, That in 1766 or 1767, Farquharson received Macpherson's translation, and compared Fingal and Temora, and some of the lesser poems, with the Gaelic ; 7th, That he



frequently complained that the English version did not come up to the strength of the original ; 8th, That the Rev. James Macgillivray, a student of poetry and rhetoric, an admirer of the ancient classics, and a contemner of Erse poems, being converted by the translation of Macpherson, paid more attention to Farquharson's comparison than he would have otherwise done ; 9th, and finally, That Farquharson was a man of great sincerity and good information on the authenticity of Ossian.

Such is the substance of the new evidence which Sir John Sinclair has brought before the public, and which he thinks capable of removing the doubts of the most incredulous.

That Mr. Farquharson did make a collection of compositions in the Gaelic language, is not disputed, nor that it was contained in a large folio paper book, about three inches thick, written close in a small letter. The evidence for this is satisfactory. It is equally so, that he was assisted in his studies by Mrs. Fraser, of Culbokie, who had made a similar collection, which she called *a Bolg solair*, written in *fine large Irish characters*, and that Mr. Farquharson acknowledged he had got a great many of his poems from that lady. But it does not appear that his collection was confined, as Sir John Sinclair's proposition might lead us to suppose, to poems called by him Ossian's Poems, but that it was of a very miscellaneous description, and "contained," as the compiler was repeatedly heard to assert, "various Gaelic songs, a few fragments of modern composition, but chiefly *extracts* of Ossian's Poems." Bishop Cameron speaks of it as containing only "a very considerable part of what was afterwards translated and published by Macpherson." Mr. Macgillivray was convinced that it contained them *all*; nay, it must have contained more; for he avers, that he "often heard Mr. Farquharson regret, that Macpherson had not found or published several poems contained

in his MS., and of no less merit than any of those laid before the public."

In these accounts are some discrepancies, not, however, of sufficient magnitude to invalidate the existence of the Gaelic miscellany, but to cause some hesitation in believing all that is reported of its contents. That it was left at Douay College, and remained there for years, seems unquestionable. It was seen there by gentlemen whose veracity we cannot doubt. But is it not possible that in some circumstances connected with it, they may have been deceived? It does not appear that any one of the witnesses whose direct testimony is given on this occasion, examined the MS. for himself, or formed any comparison between it and the translation. This task had devolved solely upon Farquharson, and they are contented with repeating his observations. Were they assured, or was Farquharson the compiler himself assured, that the supposed originals of Ossian were not transcripts of the Irish Fenian Poems, in which the names of *Oisín* and *Fin* so frequently occur? Were they asked whether they ever heard the name of Patrick in the poems, or if any of them were in the form of dialogue between Oisín and the Irish saint? Is it even clearly ascertained that any part of the miscellany was known or designated as the composition of Ossian, son of Fingal, *prior* to the appearance of Macpherson's work? Was Mrs. Fraser ever heard to ascribe any part of her collection to the great Celtic bard? Do not the *fine large Irish characters* of her MS., from which Farquharson enriched his volume, point both to the true character and source of its most elegant "extracts?"

Admitting as we do, that Mr. Macgillivray and the other witnesses, whom Sir John Sinclair has adduced, have reported truly what they saw, heard, and believed, we should come next to the examination of Farquharson's character as a competent scholar and



honest critic. But here unfortunately no data are given by which we can form a just estimate, or ascertain what respect is due to his authority. The only criterion by which we can form any judgment, is his declaration, that the translation falls short of the original, and that Ossian is "not inferior to Virgil or Homer." The latter declaration does not, we confess, enhance our opinion of his critical discernment. But we shall not dispute :

"Cedite, Romani Scriptores! Cedite, Graii!"

Some prefer Robin Hood's Garland to the Iliad, and think Will Scarlet and Little John much nobler heroes than Achilles and Ajax. As to the former declaration, it is worth nothing unless supported by proof. There are hundreds of Irish scholars at this moment, who will affirm that no translation can render justice to the beauty and force of their vernacular tongue.

Our judgment of Farquharson must rest upon the credit which we attach to the testimony of his friends and admirers. That testimony is derived from memory, and after a lapse of many years. But memory, as all men know, is often fallacious. It supplies a few broken or insulated facts, which imagination combines, and endeavours to form into a consistent history. Mr. Macgillivray, the principal witness, left the College of Douay in 1775, and thirty-one years afterwards, in 1806, informs us, that in 1766 or 1767 Farquharson first received a copy of Macpherson's translation, and compared it with the Gaelic. Prior to this event, Mr. Macgillivray had been obstinate in denying the merit of the Highland bards, but the beauty of the new version wrought a complete revolution in his taste, and, contrary to the usual process, he found in the translation, perfections which till now had never been discovered in the original. His eyes were opened, and he was taught to believe that even the new version,

with all its superlative excellence, was but a faint shadow of the strength and majesty of the Celtic Homer. But Gaelic poetry, as he informs us, was now “frequently brought upon the carpet.” Ossian was become a subject of national interest, and the ancient literary renown of Caledonia, was involved in the question of his superior genius. It was equally involved in the question of his authenticity, and unless this could be supported, all would be lost. To settle this point, Bishop Cameron, in one of his letters, informed Sir John Sinclair, that Mr. Macgillivray saw *the greatest part* of Fingal and Temora collated by Mr. Farquharson with the original; and Macgillivray himself says, “I have an hundred times seen him turning over the folio, when he read the translation, and comparing it with the Erse; and I can positively say, that I saw him in this manner go through *the whole poems* of Fingal and Temora.” This is strong and decisive language; still we hesitate. Had he only made a proper use of some one of the “hundred” opportunities which he enjoyed, to take down in writing a few of the passages which most forcibly struck either Farquharson or himself, both in the original and the translation, page for page, and line for line, and presented them to the world as a specimen of the mode in which the comparison was conducted, his assertions might have claimed more respect; and we cannot but marvel that he did not execute this task, or induce his friend to execute it, both for their own and the public satisfaction. That Mr. Farquharson turned over his folio “an hundred times” to search for passages similar to those which he admired in Macpherson’s Ossian, we can readily believe, and also that he may have found certain similarities of thought and of diction, with an identity of names. Such similarities are found in the Fenian Tales, from which, we feel confident, Macpherson took many of the materials of his centos; and which we doubt not were, in the present instance, copied from Mrs. Fraser’s col-

lection, written in *fine large Irish characters*; for even Mr. Macgillivray says, "he has *a sort of remembrance*, that he (Farquharson) *frequently* mentioned his having got a great many of the poems from Mrs. Fraser." That such poems as either Fingal or Temora ever existed in their present form, in the Gaelic language, until they were translated into it from the English, we are forbidden to believe by the irrefutable internal evidence, to say nothing of the external, by which such an hypothesis is overthrown. How many in the Highlands of Scotland have been heard to assert, that they well knew those who could repeat the whole of Ossian's Poems in their native Erse? But when brought to the proof, it was found that they had only indulged a popular fallacy, engendered by imagination, from some bardic song or wandering tradition. Could the Douay MS. be restored, and we regret as much as Sir John Sinclair himself, that it cannot, we are strongly inclined to think that it would corroborate the justice of our opinion, and shew that the poems which Mr. Macgillivray is pleased, after Macpherson, to denominate Fingal and Temora, are no other than Erragon, Magnus More, or some other of the well-known Irish tales. But if they were really what he supposes and affirms them to have been, is it, in the least degree, credible that their existence should be confined to a single copy, or at most, to a second, in the hands of Macpherson, while copies of far inferior compositions, are to be found in the library of every curious collector? Is it not contrary to all human experience to suppose that the worthless is preserved, while the valuable is left to perish? Homer lives; Chærilus and all the cyclical poets have died.

But if there was only one copy left of the genuine Ossian in the original tongue, wherefore was it not preserved? Why did not the friends of Scotland, in Douay, guard the MS. as the palladium of their country? There is not, perhaps, in the records of literature, a



more disgraceful history than this of the Douay collection. Its fate reflects dishonour on all who had a knowledge of its existence, but particularly on those who should have felt an interest in its preservation. Why were they so wanting to their country's fame and their own, as to suffer it to be destroyed? Let it not be pleaded that this was done without their knowledge, or a consciousness of its value. Macgillivray, who is praised as "a great proficient in poetry, and much admired for his taste," saw it hastening to decay in 1775; but notwithstanding the interest which he appears to have taken in the general subject, he left it quietly to its fate. It was not, however, doomed to rapid destruction, neither was it surreptitiously removed by an Irish Ulysses, jealous of his own dear country's renown. When Bishop Chisholm left Douay in 1777, it was still in existence, and might have been saved. But he also forbore to take it under his protection; and thus, this most invaluable collection of Gaelic poems; this Ossian, "not inferior to Homer and Virgil," this precious and unique treasure is deserted by its best friends in a foreign land, to be treated as a thing vile and contemptible, torn and mutilated by students ignorant of its contents, and at last employed, leaf after leaf, as a substitute for fire-wood to kindle their stove! And all this at the very time the Ossianic controversy was raging, when its appearance would have acted as a charm in stilling the noise of the combat, turned Doctor Johnson, with all his literary myrmidons, to flight, and for ever secured the triumph of Scotland, and put her enemies to shame! Was there no library in Douay College, in which books might be safely lodged; nor librarian, nor provost or rector, to prohibit the licentious waste of such valuable manuscripts? We can imagine only one plea by which we think it possible to justify or palliate the neglect and destruction of Farquharson's miscellany, and this is, that it was not worth preserving. It would have rendered



no service to the cause of Macpherson. Living, it might have tended only to his exposure; dead, it could tell no tales. But since it has fulfilled its destinies, and Douay students, ignorant of Gaelic as *Opician*\* mice of Greek, have celebrated its funeral rites in their stove, wherefore now disturb its ashes, or evoke its ghost to testify in behalf of the most audacious forgery of modern times?

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## SECTION II.

### *Macpherson's Ossian compared with the new Translation of the pretended original Gaelic Version.*

THE defenders of Macpherson's Ossian being foiled and vanquished in all their attempts to support its authenticity, have assumed a new position, and affirm that he was utterly destitute of the genius necessary to the composition of those exquisite productions which bear his name. As a proof, they allege the failure of his translation of Homer, and conclude, that he fell as far short of giving a just English version of the Celtic as of the Grecian bard. "When," says Graham, "we consider the rest of his literary efforts with an impartial eye, it is presumed that they will be found to exhibit an inferiority of genius and a mediocrity of talent altogether unequal to the splendid poetry, which, under the name of Ossian, has attracted the admiration of Europe." Poor Macpherson! How dreadfully would he be mortified by such defences as this! After all his industry in compiling poems for the honour of Scotland, to be

\*"Et divina *Opici* rodebant carmina mures."—Juv.

thus cruelly sacrificed at the shrine of the Celtic bard ! Every species of literary abuse is heaped upon his head. It is discovered that his genius never soared above mediocrity ; that he had not even the requisites of a faithful translator ; that he was unjust to his original ; that he maims him by retrenchment, or deforms him by excrescences. His fate we cannot help acknowledging to be merited, but it should have been inflicted by other hands. He should not have had to exclaim, “ *Et tu Brute !* ”\*

They who urge the charges of ignorance and incompetency against Macpherson, pride themselves on having the genuine Poems of Ossian to substantiate their charges. They are printed in a splendid edition, with a Latin version, in Sir John Sinclair’s work ; and to enable the mere English reader to determine how far the censures heaped on Macpherson are just, a new translation by the Rev. Thomas Ross, is printed with Macpherson’s translation on opposite pages. To the former the following notice is prefixed : “ The attention of the reader is particularly requested to those passages in this

\* Ross, throughout the notes to his translation of the first Book of Fingal, in the first volume of Sir John Sinclair’s publication, is unsparing in his censure of Macpherson. He accuses him of ignorance of Gaelic, of want of judgment and taste, and of frequent insertion of the ideas of other poets. In a note on a speech of Cuchullin, beginning at the 101st line, he asks, is this the language of a great commander, addressing his associates in arms, in a grand council of war, assembled on the most pressing emergency ? Or does it not rather resemble the *incoherent ravings of a madman* ? Again, he avers of some ideas in a speech of Calmar, lines 140-146, that they are borrowed from the speech of Belial in Milton, and have no more connexion with Calmar’s speech than the ravings of Sancho Panza with the sublimity of Paradise Lost. Once more he tells us, that “ the translator, hardly ever faithful to his original, departs entirely from the sense of the Gaelic poem, and *disgusts* his readers with the indigested and absurd extravagancies of his own confused imagination ! ” Finally, he condemns him for the stupidity of his conceits, for foolish pomposity of words without any conceivable meaning ; for borrowing from the Scriptures and other sources ; and for the random insertion of fantasies and absurdities too gross for any reflecting mind !

translation which are printed in italics, as clearly proving the superiority of the new translation." With this request we shall comply, bring the two versions into fair comparison, and draw our own inference. The first passage worthy of notice commences at the seventh line :

<i>Macpherson's Translation.</i>	<i>Ross's Translation.</i>
The scout of ocean comes	The scout of ocean came
Moran, the son of Fithil.	The swift, high-bounding son of Fithil.
"Arise," says the youth, "Cuthullin arise!"	Rise! Cuchullin rise!
I see the ships of the north!	I see a mighty fleet from the north!
Many, chief of men, are the foe;	Haste, haste, thou chief of the feast;
Many the heroes of the sea-borne Swaran!"	Great is Swaran, numerous his host.

We think we can perceive more taste, with more simplicity and propriety, in Macpherson's lines, than in those of his rival. He does not waste time in giving superfluous epithets to the scout of ocean. "I see the ships of the north," is less prosaic than "*I see a mighty fleet from the north.*" The former expression particularizes the object, and intimates a knowledge and a fear of approaching hostility. The *haste, haste!* of Ross after the *rise, rise!* looks like rhetorical artifice, and "*thou chief of the feast,*" unless a sarcasm were meant, is quite inapplicable to Cuchullin lying with his spear and shield by the wall of Tura. We, therefore, prefer Macpherson's "chief of men." It reminds us of *αἰεὶ ἀνδρῶν*, our old school-boy acquaintance. We also deem Macpherson's repetition of *many*, preferable to the *great* and *numerous* of Ross. The epithet *sea-borne*, independently of the musical swell which it gives to the rhythm, is happily introduced, and the 15th and 16th lines, viz :

"It is Fingal, king of deserts,  
With aid to green Erin of streams."

are incomparably more poetical than Ross's,

"Son of Fithil, it is Fingal,  
High chief of the dusky hills."



It is evident that the two passages cannot be from a common original.

*Macpherson, line 18.*

"I beheld their chief," says Moran,  
 "Tall as a glittering rock,  
 His spear is a blasted pine.  
 His shield the rising moon!  
 He sat on the shore!  
 Like a cloud of mist on the silent hill!"

*Ross.*

"I beheld their chief," said Moran,  
 "Their hero is like a rock,  
 His spear like a fir on the mountain cliff,  
 Like the rising moon his shield.  
 He sat upon a rock on the shore,  
 Like the mist on yonder hill."

Mr. Ross is terribly severe on Macpherson for giving his lines as a translation of Ossian. For there is no such epithet as *glittering* in the original; and what he says of the spear is "ridiculously absurd; for it absolutely constitutes the spear a blasted pine; and no poet of real genius would compare the spear of a hero to a *blasted* tree, which conveys the idea of weakness, not of strength. \* \* \* \* The true poet of nature *knew better things*, and the image which he presents to the mind is one of the most picturesque, sublime, and beautiful, in the whole compass of nature."

Notwithstanding this "most sublime, and beautiful, and picturesque" panegyric, we are still so deficient in taste, as to prefer the old version to the new. If the hero were like a rock for firmness or strength, or any other quality, being clothed in mail he was like a *glittering* rock,\* unless his armour had contracted rust from the salt sea spray, and this is not mentioned. The original of the comparison of a spear to a pine, is to be found in the club of Polyphemus, which Homer equals to the mast of a ship, οσσον ὅ' ἔσεν νηός, Oddy. ix. 322. Virgil terms it a truncated pine. *Trunca manum pinus regit*, et vestigia firmat.—Æn. iii. 659. Our own great poet

\* In the first edition, the hero was *tall as a rock of ice*, but this being found too frigid a comparison, it was changed to a *glittering* rock.



caught the idea, and enriched it with all his wonted power of amplification :

“ His spear, to equal which the tallest pine,  
Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast,  
Of some great ammiral, were but a wand.”

Thence it passed into the hands of James Macpherson, Esq. being in the process of transplantation, *blasted*; and thence into a new version of his Ossian into Gaelic, again to be revived and reproduced in an English translation, by the Rev. Thomas Ross, with all its leafy honours thick about it, deep-rooted and unscathed “on a mountain cliff.” But we are of opinion that it would have been better to let the *blasted pine* remain unmolested. It forms no unapt similitude to a spear; a fir tree on a mountain cliff, unless it be blasted, conveys none. Those whom all will acknowledge to be genuine poets of nature, never thought of such a comparison. Homer compares the giant’s club, or walking staff, not to a tree growing, but to a tree whose growth was past, namely, the mast of a ship. In Virgil it is *trunca pinus*, a pine maimed of its head and roots; and in Milton, a pine hewn to be a mast, of course stripped of every leafy and branchy incumbrance. The epithet *blasted* does not necessarily imply the idea of weakness, but of denudation. We do not, however, insist on its propriety. All we contend for is, that Macpherson’s comparison is more just and natural, than that either in the Gaelic or in Ross’s version.

*Macpherson, line 24.*

Many, chief of heroes! I said  
Many are our hands of war.  
Well art thou named the mighty man;  
But many mighty men are seen  
From Tura’s windy walls.

*Ross.*

Leader of strangers, numerous  
Are the impetuous hosts which rise with thee,  
Fierce warriors of most desperate strokes,  
Whose swords are sharp in the strife of  
heroes:  
But more numerous and mighty chiefs,  
Surround the windy Tura.

From the most cursory glance of these lines, we should have no hesitation in pronouncing Macpherson's the original, and Ross's the imitation. An original writer is contented with a brief and simple idea or description; a translator generally amplifies, and an imitator endeavours, as he ought, to improve. They often become paraphrastic, and hope to merit the praise of originality for some new accessory thought or embellishment. The address of Moran to Swaran, in the above lines of Macpherson, is brief and appropriate; his object being to intimidate the invaders by a statement of the number and valour of the foes by whom they were about to be encountered. This he makes simply and forcibly, at the same time paying a due compliment to the leader. Ross's lines have those marks of imitation which have been noticed. They are crowded with epithets. The effort to improve is manifest, and the attempted improvement itself is injudicious. Wherefore should Swaran be told of his own forces that they were numerous, and impetuous, of desperate strokes and sharp swords? And how did Moran know all these particulars "of strangers" who had only just landed, who had made no impetuous attack, whose strokes were yet unfelt, and whose swords still slept in their scabbards?

*Macpherson, line 42.*

Fingal says  
That the king of ocean fell!  
But Swaran says, he stood!

*Ross.*

Said Fingal the king,  
The chief of the ocean has fallen in the vale.  
He is not fallen, my answer was.

The antithetical strength and brevity of Macpherson in these lines, are too manifestly superior to his rival's, with their unnecessary adjuncts, to require any comment.

*Macpherson.*

Dark Cuthullin shall be great or dead.

*Ross.*

Cuchullin, as undaunted as he,  
Shall conquer in the field, or nobly die.

Here Macpherson expresses with poetic energy in three monosyllables, a sentiment which Ross renders weak and insipid by expansion into nearly two whole lines, and one of them an heroic, consisting of ten syllables ! Who can doubt which is the original ?

Cuchullin's speech consists of eight short lines in Macpherson's version, in Ross's it is diluted into ten, of which the ninth contains twelve syllables, and the tenth eleven. "My heroes shall hear and obey" says the former version. The latter, of words more liberal, repeats a command already given, "strike, son of Fithil, the shield of Semo with speed," and adds, with colloquial bathos, "call in our heroes from the copses and woods," and this is a specimen of the genuine Ossian, which is to throw Macpherson into utter oblivion or contempt !

*Macpherson, line 74.*

Caolt stretch thy side as thou movest  
Along the whistling heath of Mora,  
Thy side that is white as the foam of the troubled seas,  
When the dark winds pour it on rocky Cuthon.

*Ross.*

Stretch thy fair limbs, O Caolt,  
Whilst moving with speed from Mora ;  
Fairer than the drifted foam,  
On the face of a stormy sea.

The "*whilst*" of Ross is a heavy word that clogs the speed of Caolt. "Drifted foam" is a happy expression. Macpherson's description is more amplified, but it is also enriched with the images of whistling heath, dark winds, and rocky Cuthon.

*Macpherson, 95.*

Like mist that shades the hills of autumn,  
When broken and dark it settles high,  
And lifts its head to heaven.

*Ross.*

Like the grey mist of autumn,  
Which closes round the mountain ridge,  
And binds its summit to the skies.



Binds its summit to the skies! A palpable modern refinement!  
To use the language of my Lord Kaims, a peeping out of the cloven  
foot!

*Macpherson, 124.*

Fingal, who scatters the mighty,  
As stormy wind the heath,  
When streams roar through echoing Cona,  
And night settles with all her clouds on the  
hill.

*Ross.*

Fingal, who disperses the brave,  
As the whirlwind scatters the grass,  
When the torrent roars through the rocky  
Cona,  
And Morven is wrapt in the robe of heaven.

“Scatter the mighty” is scriptural language. The strong “scatter” of Macpherson is preferable to the weak “disperses” of Ross, who employs *scatter* also in the second line, where it is not wanted, and thus violates the precept of the Roman critic, “*verbis lassas onerantibus aures.*” Macpherson’s “Night settling with all her clouds on the hill,” is a magnificent picture. Ross’s “Morven wrapt in the robe of heaven,” conveys no distinct idea to our minds, or if any, it is not in keeping with the whirlwind and torrent. If by *robe* he means the clouds, he should have employed a more expressive metaphor to harmonize with the rest of the description. A robe is a dress for beauty and majesty, and not for the rocky and stormy Morven. Had he wrapt it in a brown surtout, or highland plaid, we should have understood him better.

*Macpherson, 142.*

Amid the tempest let me die,  
Torn in a cloud by angry ghosts of men;  
Amid the tempest let Calmar die,  
If ever chase was sport to him,  
So much as the battle of shieldſ.

*Ross.*

May I perish by a blast from heaven,  
(Or, may I fall by the breath of a ghost;)  
If I prefer not to the chase of the deer,  
The hottest conflicts of embattled hosts.

Laing says, "this hyperbolical rant is derived from Milton's imitation of Virgil:"

"Caught in a fiery *tempest* shall be hurled  
Each on his rock transfix'd, the *sport* and prey  
Of wracking whirlwinds."

MILTON.

"Illum expirantem transfixo pectore flammis,  
Turbine corripuit, scopuloque infixit acuto."

ÆN. I.

Macpherson's lines partake of the spirit of the great originals from whom he borrowed. They are strong and full of imagery. Ross's, as usual, are crowded with unnecessary epithets. The conflict of hosts would have been sufficiently significant without either *hottest* or *embattled*. The *battle of shields* is much better.

Macpherson, 161.

To me Cuthullin replies,  
Pleasant is the noise of arms,  
Pleasant as the thunder of heaven  
Before the shower of spring.

Ross.

Pleasant to me, said the chief of heroes,  
Is the hard crash of contending arms ;  
Pleasant as the thunder on the hills  
When the soft rain of spring descends.

These lines of Macpherson have the character of originality, Ross's of imitation. In the former we see the first ideas as they spring fresh and vigorous in the mind of a poet, in the other an abortive attempt to surpass them by epithets and amplification.

Macpherson, 165.

But gather all the shining tribes,  
That I may view the sons of war.  
Let them pass along the heath,  
Bright as the sun-shine before a storm,  
When the west wind collects the clouds,  
And Morven echoes over all her oaks.

Ross.

Let the mighty sons of Erin arise,  
Let each band form itself in shining arms :  
With speed let them sweep along the heath,  
As a sun-beam on the mountain top,  
When the west wind blows from the sea,  
And collects the thickening clouds :  
A sound is heard from the tufted Morven,  
And from the leafless oak on the plain.

“Gather all the shining tribes,” reminds us of the gathering of the clans, a comparatively modern practice. Men in arms and in orderly array before a battle, may be compared to sunshine before a storm. But what similitude have they sweeping along the heath, i. e. the plain, to Ross’s sun-beam on the mountain top? Ross gives us in the four concluding lines, what Macpherson expresses with more force and beauty in two. “Morven echoing over all her oaks,” is truly grand and poetical. How cold and insipid after this is the “sound heard from the *tufted* Morven and from the leafless oak on the plain?” Can any one doubt that the latter is an attempt to improve upon the former, as tasteless as it is abortive?

*Macpherson, 193.*

Morna ! fairest of maids !  
Calm is thy sleep in the cave of the rock,  
Thou hast fallen in darkness, like a star  
That shoots across the desert ;  
When the traveller is alone,  
And mourns the transient beam.

*Ross.*

Morna ! fairest of maids !  
Calm is thy sleep in the cave of the rock ;  
The delight of the people is fallen  
As a nightly star sparkling in the vale :  
The lonely traveller is sad  
When the light begins to fail.

Macpherson’s apostrophe is beautiful. What could more strikingly express the premature fate of Morna fallen in darkness, than the comparison to a star shooting across the desert? Ross’s nightly star sparkling in the vale, presents an image of permanent rural tranquillity. The original conception is totally mistaken and misrepresented in the Gaelic version, translated by Ross. What can be more flat and spiritless than “The light beginning to fail?” In the image of the genuine poet, there is no beginning nor progression. It is instantaneous, and conveys the most striking idea of transient, evanescent existence.



Macpherson, 218.

Thou art like the snow on the heath,  
Thy hair is the mist of Cromla  
When it curls on the hill,  
When it shines to the beam of the west.

Ross.

Thou art like the snow on the heath,  
Thy ringlets are like the mists of Cromla  
When it climbs the side of the hill,  
In the beams of the western sun.

Ross is cruel in his reprehension of these lines of Macpherson. "This simile," he observes, "is one of the most elegant and beautiful to be met with in the works of any poet. In the original it is inimitably fine. The translation of Mr. Macpherson is a mass of absolute confusion, unlike to any thing in the compass of nature. The hair is *mist*. That mist one while curls on a hill, and again, *shines* to the beam of the west." What then? Where is the confusion? When he says the hair is mist, he means like mist, and every one understands the expression thus, as distinctly as if it were introduced in the shape of Ross's formal comparison. What is a metaphor but a brief similitude? The one is as incapable as the other of being misunderstood by any reader of taste. Macpherson's mist does not one while *curl* and again *shine*, but wherefore might it not? It curls and shines at the same time. Ross has given us *ringlets* instead of *hair*, judiciously. But for a strikingly picturesque word, on which much of the beauty of the description depends, he has substituted another, by which it is impaired. The hair in Macpherson is like mist when it *curls*; in Ross when it *climbs*. Were it bristled up like an angry boar's, or standing on end, "like quills upon the fretful porcupine," it might be compared to climbing mist. But the poet is speaking of the tresses of the "fairest of women," and assimilates them to the evening mist when it *curls* on, not climbs up, but pours down, or along the side of a hill, and is gilded by the beams of the setting sun. He

would no more have compared them to climbing mist, than a water-fall to a sky-rocket.

*Macpherson, 254.*

Long shall Morna wait for Cathba !  
Behold this sword unsheathed,  
Here wanders the blood of Cathba.  
Long shall Morna wait,  
He fell by the stream of Branno !

*Ross.*

Long shalt thou wait, O Morna,  
For the boisterous son of Armin.  
Lo ! on this sharp-edged sword,  
To ITS VERY BACK is the blood of Cathbat.  
The hero was slain by me.  
Long shalt thou wait, O Morna.

Here again we discover evident marks of superiority in Macpherson. As usual, he is more simple and delicate. The words which he ascribes to Duchomar, "Behold this sword unsheathed, here wanders the blood of Cathba," indicate the fate of her lover by his hand, with sufficient plainness, without the frigid tautology of Ross, "the hero was slain by me." The expression *to its very back* we have no doubt is common to this day in the Highlands. It is characteristically savage, and quite unworthy of the pretended refinement of the classic age of the king of *tufted* Morven.

*Macpherson, 287.*

She came, in all her tears she came ;  
She drew the sword from his breast.  
He pierced her white side !  
He spread her fair locks on the ground !  
Her bursting blood sounds from her side :  
Her white arm is stained with red.

*Ross.*

Tearful and slow she came,  
To draw the sword from his side.  
He pierced the fair breast of the maid,  
She fell ; her locks were spread on the ground ;  
The blood ran purling down ;  
It was red on her arm of snow.

This passage furnishes Ross with an opportunity, which he never fails to improve, of abusing Macpherson. He lays on his critical lash with so little mercy and so little justice, as to considerably diminish our compassion for his own egregious offences. "Here," says he, "the

translator, *hardly ever faithful* to his original, departs entirely from the sense of the Gaelic poem, and *disgusts* his reader with the undigested and absurd extravagancies of his own confused imagination. He tells us that Morna, who stabbed Duchomar, came afterwards, at his request, and *drew* the sword from his breast; upon which, though the sword was in the hands of Morna, he adds, that Duchomar pierced her white side without a weapon, and then took the trouble to spread her fair locks on the ground. What a contrast to the simple tale of the poet of nature! It tells us that Morna approached Duchomar, to *draw* the sword from his side, but that as soon as she came within reach of his arm, he seized her by the breast, and by a last desperate effort of expiring nature, drew the sword from his own side, and plunged it into her heart. He adds, in all the simplicity of nature, "She fell, her locks *were* spread on the ground."

Notwithstanding this high-seasoned morsel of criticism, our fastidious taste is not satisfied. We think Macpherson's account of the fact is fully as intelligible and consistent as that of Ross. We understand from the former, that Morna did approach and draw the sword from the bosom of Duchomar. We are at liberty to suppose that she did not retain the sword, but rather cast it by his side, within his reach, or that he snatched it from her, and re-grasped it in his dying hand, or that he had his Highland dirk prepared to wreak his revenge. Any supposition is preferable to Ross's crude invention, that the expiring ruffian extricated the sword by his own efforts, and seized the maid by the breast, and pierced her white side. By the way, this improver and corrector of Macpherson is guilty of the gross inconsistency of giving Duchomar his death-wound in *the side*, then saying, "cold is the sword, it is cold in my *breast*, O Morna!" The critic is manifestly ignorant of the language of poetry, or he never could have made so silly an observation, as that "he took the trouble to



spread her fair locks on the ground." The English verb, *spread*, for instance, is often used, particularly in poetry, in a sense similar to that of the Hebrew conjugation, Hiphil, and signifies not the action of which we are the immediate agent, but of which we are the cause. "He spread her locks," means that he was the cause of her locks being spread, or dishevelled by her fall to the ground. When one warrior is said to *stretch* another on the plain, the expression does not mean, as Ross would interpret it, that he performed the office of an old woman, by putting himself to "the trouble" of stretching the limbs of a corse to prepare it for the coffin, but simply, that he slew or laid him prostrate. Sad penance to be obliged to descend to criticisms like this! Ross says, the "blood ran purling down." So would blood from the scratch of a pin or the prick of a needle. The true poet says, the "bursting blood *sounds* from her side," thus intimating the depth, the force, and the fatal effects of her death wound.

"Cruor emicat alte.

Non aliter, quam cum vitiato fistula plumbo,  
Scinditur, et tenues, *stridente* foramine, longe  
Ejaculatur aquas: atque ictibus aera rumpit."

OVID.

*Macpherson, 350.*

It bends behind like a wave near a rock ;  
Like the sun-streaked mist of the heath.  
Its sides are embossed with stones,  
And sparkle like the sea round the boat of  
    night.  
Of polished yew is its beam ;  
Its seat of the smoothest bone.  
The sides are replenished with spears ;  
The bottom is the foot-stool of heroes !

*Ross.*

Behind, it bends down like a wave,  
Or mist round the cliff of a rugged rock ;  
Around it is the glare of gems,  
Like the sea round the vessel at night.  
Its beam is of shining yew.  
Its seat of polished bone,  
It is filled with spears,  
With shields, with swords, with heroes.

This is the description of the famous car of Cuchullin. Ever since its first appearance, it has furnished critics with a very satisfactory proof of its being recently constructed of materials collected from Homer, Ovid, and the Song of Solomon. But our object at present is, to compare Macpherson's description with that presented to us by Mr. Ross, as a faithful transcript of the genuine and original Gaelic. Ross admits that Macpherson, on whom, as usual, he is unsparingly severe, "has borrowed, perhaps," some ideas from the Canticles that are not suggested by the original. The former, instead of saying that "its sides are replenished with spears, and its bottom is the footstool of heroes," says, "it is filled with spears, with shields, with swords, with heroes." Macpherson's version is unquestionably more elegant, and he should be forgiven for borrowing a few ornaments from the Hebrew bard, only for the dishonest endeavour to make them his own. Ross, instead of presenting us with the fine image of the footstool of heroes, *fills* the car with all kinds of arms, and converts it into a baggage waggon. He says, "that the absurdity of comparing the curvature behind the car, first to a wave near a rock, and next to the sun streaked mist of the heath, is not vindicated by the original, where it is compared to a wave or to mist round the cliff of a rock." The former comparison to a "wave near a rock," where it assumes a hollow curve, is just and beautiful: but Ross omits "near the rock," and so loses both the propriety of the simile and the beauty of the image. Why it should be compared to "mist on the heath," or "to mist round a rugged rock," we cannot discover; but if one of these comparisons must be admitted, we prefer the former; for it may be mist driven by the wind, and its motion will be one point of resemblance at least; but mist round a rock, gives us the idea of something stationary, and has no more resemblance to a warrior's car rushing to battle, than a sleeping ward of invalids, to the British cavalry charging the enemy.

Throughout Ross's description both of the car and the horses, there is an evident effort, which as evidently fails, to surpass Macpherson's, by the addition of epithets which can serve no purpose, but that of filling up the rhythm of the verse in the Gaelic translation. Macpherson says, "the rapid car of Cuthullin, the noble son of Semo." This must be improved, says Ross; and accordingly he writes, "the *polished* rapid car of Cuchullin, the noble son of *mighty* Semo."—"Before the right side of the car," says Macpherson, "is seen the snorting horse." We shall improve this also, quoth Ross; and forthwith appears: "On the right side of the *noble* car, is seen the *high-blooded* snorting steed." *High-blooded*, if we mistake not, betrays the "cloven foot." Again, Macpherson says, "the fleet, bounding son of the hill;" and Ross exclaims, the original is "swift-footed, *white-nosed* son of the hills!" Which has the superior claim to originality, let the reader judge.

In "the embossed stones sparkling like the sea round the boat of night," we have a simile of great beauty. Ross has destroyed it in his version. Instead of embossed stones sparkling like the sea, he gives us with marvellous infelicity, the "glare of gems like the sea," omitting the very, and the only word, *sparkling*, which gives a true image of the phosphorescent or luminous appearance of the ocean, which does not glare, but sparkle. With equal infelicity he substitutes vessel for boat, and the prose *at night*, for the poetry "of night." The warrior's car might well be assimilated to a boat, which is in fact a floating car; but the term, *vessel*, suggests the idea of masts and sails, and altogether undoes the resemblance.

Macpherson, 363.

The spreading of the mane above,  
Is like a stream of smoke on a ridge of rocks.

Ross.

The spreading of his forelock above,  
Like the mist on the dwelling of the deer.



Ross says, "the incongruous and fantastic figure of a *stream* of *smoke* on a *ridge* of rocks is not in the Gaelic poem ; but the horse's forelock is said to be like a small cloud of mist on the top of a hill." Here the text is at variance with the note, and contains nothing about either a small cloud, or the top of a hill. In Macpherson's simile we can trace some resemblance between the objects compared, in Ross's none. A horse's neck, to a fanciful imagination, may bear some similitude to a curved ridge of rocks ; and his mane, tossing as he moves, to a current of smoke, such as Macpherson must have often seen rising from a kelp-kiln, and sailing along the cliffs on the sea beach. But in the name of all the muses nine, and of all the ancient Irish and Caledonian bards, where is the resemblance between a horse's forelock and "mist on the dwelling of deer," i. e. mist in a deer park? Not long since, Morna's hair was compared to mist : how did the horse's mane or forelock become entitled to a similar comparison? Macpherson has shown more taste and variety in preferring smoke.

Nothing can be more injudicious than the description of the car of Cuchullin, by the timid scout of Swaran. He is described as having just returned from spying the approaching enemy, as trembling with fear, "his eyes rolled wildly round, his heart beat high against his side, his words were faltering—broken—*slow*." Instead of speaking in a style accordant to this character, and breaking out into a few hasty ejaculations expressive of his fear, and of the necessity of preparation for instant combat, he gives us a long elaborate speech of fifty-three lines, inflated with high-sounding epithets, and embossed with similes about mist and smoke, and gems, and footstools, and the boat of night, eagles, and winter storms, and the king of shells, and white-nosed horses ! We wonder he did not tell us the name of the farrier of these horses, with what metal they were shod, and the number of nails employed in the arming of their loud resound-

ing hoofs; and that he did not make Sulinsifadda or Dusronnal speak and prophesy like their prototype Xanthus, in Homer. Ross endeavours to obviate some of the objections which have been made to the authenticity and propriety of the description, but with no success. "The minuteness of the description," he says, "can be considered as no objection whatever, as the whole speech," (though broken—faltering—slow—and almost the length of a moderate sermon,) "may have been delivered in the space of one minute and a half of time!" "And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night. Oh! against all rules, my Lord, most *achronometrically*. He suspended his voice a dozen times, three seconds, and three-fifths, by a stop-watch, my Lord, each time." Admirable critic! We hope for the sake of the son of Arno, that Swaran had not Mr. Ross's stop-watch, and that he was not addicted to the sin of criticism.

*Macpherson, 485.*

The field echoes from wing to wing,  
As a hundred hammers that rise  
By turns, on the red son of the furnace.

*Ross.*

The cry of battle from wing to wing,  
The roaring bloody hot encounter,  
Like a hundred hammers wildly beating  
Successive sparks from the red son of the furnace.

Here again, we see the plainest marks of imitation in the lines of Ross. The translator into Gaelic seems to have entertained the common idea, that to amplify is to improve. Hence he gives us a long string of useless adjuncts. The encounter is roaring and bloody, and *hot* of course. But why are the hammers made to beat *wildly*? The rising *by turns* of Macpherson, gives us a better idea of the measured cadence of hammer and sledge, with their alternate strokes. The word *successive* is clogging and superfluous. The original of the comparison itself is to be found in the Irish poem, *Íaoið mág nuyr*

mojn, in which the son of Comhal and the king of Lochlin are depicted as striking fire from their mail, or encountering swords, like the sparkles from two hammers.

“Zo mað dealna me ða oib  
Comnac fuilteac an ða nŕg.”

Thus paraphrastically rendered by Miss Brooke :

“As when two sinewy sons of flame  
At the dark anvil meet;  
With thundering sound, and ceaseless aim,  
Their mighty hammers beat:  
Such are the fierce contending kings!  
Such strokes their fury sends;  
Such thunder from their weapons rings,  
And sparkling flame ascends.”

The two hammers of the Irish poem are multiplied by Macpherson into a hundred. The improver on Macpherson sets these hundred hammers *wildly* a beating; and another improver, for the knowledge of whom we are indebted to the Report of the Highland Society, p. 212, is so obliging as to inform us of the precise time when they are animated to their licentious frenzy. It is

Is caoir theinntigh teachd a teallach.

“When the bar comes fiery red hot from the furnace!”

*Macpherson, 599.*

Her white bosom is seen from her robe,  
As the moon from the clouds of night,  
When its edge heaves white on the view,  
From the darkness which covers its orb;  
Her voice was softer than the harp,  
To raise the song of grief:  
Her soul was fixed on Grudar,  
The secret look of her eye was his.

*Ross.*

From her light robe appeared,  
Her heaving breast like the full moon of night,  
When its disk begins to emerge  
From the darkness of its shade to light.  
Her voice was soft as the harp,  
While she raised the song of grief.  
(Her eye was like a star.)



The reader will observe in Ross's version here the same fault of which we have had such frequent occasion to complain, the use of unnecessary epithets. Instead of Macpherson's "robe," he gives us "light robe;" instead of "moon," the "full moon;" when half a moon or a crescent would have answered as well. "When its disk begins to emerge," is technically astronomic, and not to be compared either in beauty or simplicity, to "its edge heaves white on the view." *Heaves* is, in this situation, one of those happy picturesque words, of which Ross seems to have had no perception. "From the darkness of its shade to light," leaves us in doubt as to the precise image intended by the poet. Ross says, "the figure unquestionably is that of the moon beginning to emerge from a total eclipse." But he should have remembered that eclipses were objects of terror to the old Caledonians of Ossian's days; that they thought such phenomena portended disastrous changes to the nations, as we learn from a passage of Macpherson, imitated from Milton; and that, therefore, so judicious a poet as the great Celtic bard could never be so deficient in taste, as to compare his heroine's bosom to the moon emerging from an eclipse, especially when he could say with equal elegance, with not less meaning, and assuredly with far more simplicity, "from the darkness which covers its orb," viz. the shadow of a passing cloud. The attempt to improve on the original is obvious. Macpherson has some meaning in saying, "the secret look of her eye was his." But what is the object of the other version in saying, in a parenthesis, "her eye was like a star?" By the way, this simile is borrowed from the Irish poem of "The Chase," where it is stated that the eye of Guillen's daughter, the fair enchantress, was like a "freezing star."

We have now proceeded in our comparison of the two versions far enough for our own complete satisfaction, we trust, of our reader's

also, and have arrived at a conclusion the very reverse of Sir John Sinclair's. He has stated it, as his opinion, that "whoever carefully examines and compares the two translations, will be convinced that Mr. Ross's new translation furnishes the strongest possible internal proofs, that the Gaelic was the original, and Macpherson's a loose, and in many parts, a turgid translation from that original. "He fortifies his own opinion by that of Miss Baillie's, the dramatic author, who remarks, that the new translation appears less pompous, more simple, and more appropriate, than that of Macpherson; and besides being free from those particular images and forms of expression, which, in his seem to be borrowed from other sources; it presents us with the story, and the images, and sentiments, that enrich the story in a more distinct and defined manner, avoiding the great repetition of general epithets, which give to the other, notwithstanding all its beauties, a fatiguing sameness, of which many have complained. This I should think must impress the public at large with a belief that the Gaelic copy is the original, and Macpherson's a translation."

We are sorry Miss Baillie ever penned these observations; they compel us to believe and to affirm, that in them she has sacrificed her taste and judgment to complaisance; and that had she fairly examined and compared the two versions, she would have dissented from Sir John Sinclair's opinion as much as ourselves. We beg the reader to bear in mind, that the passages which we have compared, are, with one or two brief exceptions, those printed in *italic* in Ross's version, as containing the demonstration of the Baronet's problem. Unless we are egregiously deceived, we have clearly proved the superiority of the parallel passages in Macpherson. They are less laboured, less bolstered up with epithets, in imagery more correct, in the choice of particular expressions more picturesque, and altogether have more of

the freshness and simplicity of an original. Such being our judgment from passages of Sir John's, or Ross's own selection, how much *a fortiori* would it be strengthened, were we to institute a comparison with passages selected by ourselves? But we waive our advantage, being fully satisfied that the Gaelic, from which Ross made his version, is a translation from Macpherson's English Ossian; and that the materials of the latter are to be found in the Greek, Latin, and English poets, in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the Irish Fenian tales.

### ADDENDA.

Mr. Laing informs us that "the *original* Earse of Malvina's dream, was produced by the translator at Lord Kaimes's request. The greatest difficulty was to produce the English original: for a ballad in blank verse of eight syllables, with a few occasional rhymes, may enable us to conceive the extreme facility of composition in his vernacular tongue. In the following verses there are neither the numbers of ancient, nor the rhymes of modern poetry, nor the artful alliteration of the Scalds and of the Irish bards, but the same rude rhythm or cadence, with his measured prose."

Se guth anaim mo riun at ann!  
O's' ainmic gu aisling Mhalmhin, thu  
Fosglaihse *talla* nau *speur*,  
Aithriche Thoscair nan cruai bheum  
Fosglaihse *dorsa* nan *nial*,  
Tha ceuma Mhalmhine gu dian.

It was the voice of my love,  
Seldom art thou in the dreams of Malvina.  
Open your airy halls, (halls of the sky,)  
O fathers of Toscar of shields, (hard blows,)  
Open the gates (doors) of your clouds;  
The steps of Malvina (Malvina's departure) are near,

On these lines he observes, that "if the massy halls of Selma, its towers, and its shaded walls, are inconsistent with the wattled huts of the third century, we discover here the gothic hall, and its doors by name. *Talla*, a corruption of hall, occurs neither in O'Brian nor in the old description of Tigh Teamhra, the hall or house of Temora;—and *dorus*, a door, is a word equally universal among the northern nations, and inconsistent with Ossian. *Speur*, *spier*, the sky, is confessedly the Latin *sphæra*. \* \* \* \* The last line, the steps of Malvina in the first edition, of Malvina's *departure*, are near, is transcribed from Scripture, "the time



of my departure is at hand," 2 Tim. iv. 6. But the translator discovered that the Earse had no word equivalent to *departure*, as expressive of death, which was therefore omitted, and from the poverty of language, the *voice of departed bards*, was translated, *guth nam bard nach beo*; not being, not alive."

We have quoted this passage from Laing, to shew not only the modern date of the Gaelic, but to give the reader an opportunity of comparing it with the *second original* which Macpherson produced, and Sir John Sinclair published.

The latter runs thus :

Se guth ciuin mo ruin a t' ann !  
 Neo-mhinic gann gn m'aisling fein thu.  
 Fosglaidh sibhs' bhuir talla thall.  
 Shinns're Thoscair nan ard speur ;  
 Fosglaidh sibhse dorsa nan neul.  
 Tha Malmbina gn dian fo dheur.

Est vox lenis mei amantis quæ adest !  
 Infrequens rara ad meum ipsius somnium tu venis.  
 Aperite vos vestrum domicilium ultra (nubes)  
 Proavi Toscaris arduarum sphaerarum  
 Aperite vos portas nubium.  
 Est Malvina vehementer sub lacrymis.

There is such a marked discrepancy between the two versions, both in diction and orthography, that one might be excused for supposing them to be extracted from different compositions. The fact seems to be, that the former was the first literal translation from the English, and that the second is an improved copy, which has undergone the same process of alteration as translations generally experience, and as is particularly exemplified in the specimens quoted by Doctor Johnson of Pope's translation of the *Iliad*, in his life of that poet.

The Highland Society, in the XVth Number of the Appendix, has published "Passages extracted from ancient Gaelic Poems, in the possession of the Committee, with a literal translation by Doctor Donald Smith, compared with parts of the Epic Poem of Fingal, as published by Mr. Macpherson."

These passages are collected from different sources, and have but a very distant resemblance to Macpherson's English Fingal, and, of course, to its Gaelic translation. Some of them, we suppose, are borrowed from old Irish poems, lines and phrases at least ; others are of modern fabrication. "Son of Cairbre, from *the red tree*," *chraoibh ruaidh* of the red branch, is evidently indicative of the Irish knights who were designated by that title. Instead of Cuchullin sitting by the wall of Tura, Daol, is represented in the first of these passages, as watching the ocean, and then hastening to apprize the king of Tara of an approaching fleet of invaders, led, not by Macpherson's Swaran, but by Garve, the son of Starno. His description of the chief shall be given here both in the Gaelic and the English, that the reader may compare them with Macpherson's.

*Highland Society's ANCIENT Gaelic.*

Gum be sud am fear madhant  
 Is e na stuaigh alla mara chugain  
 Chite an laoch mar aiteal ceo  
 B'amhail is crann giusaich (a mhoid)  
 Ann an corag nan cothan dluth  
 Mar am fear fu an osaig chiuin.

*Macpherson's Gaelic.*

Coimeas do 'n charraig an triath,  
 A shleagh mar ghiubhas air scor-hheinn,  
 Mar ghealaich ag eirigh a sgiath:  
 Shiudh e air carraig san traigh  
 M'aran ceo tha thall air a bheinn  
 'S lionar, a chinn-uidhe nan daimh  
 Lamh chomhraig, a dh'eireas leat fein.

*Translation by Dr. Donald Smith.*

Their chief, dexterous in arms,  
 Is a rock bending over our shore,  
 I beheld the hero like a spreading mist;  
 (Tall) he seemed as a pine of the forest  
 In the array of the hosts, close waving  
 Like the grass that is moved by the gentle breeze.

*Ross's Translation.*

The hero is like a rock,  
 His spear like a fir on the mountain cliff,  
 Like the rising moon his shield;  
 He sat upon the rock on the shore,  
 Like the mist on yonder hill.  
 Leader of strangers, numerous  
 Are the impetuous hosts which rise with thee.

*Macpherson's English.*

Tall as a glittering rock,  
 His spear is a blasted pine,  
 He sat on the shore,  
 Like a cloud of mist on the silent hill.

FINGAL, Book I. London, 1773.

Which of these is the original? We have no hesitation in boldly affirming, the last, Macpherson's English; because it is more brief and simple than the others, which are evidently amplified *improvements*. It is not to be imagined that Macpherson, with a Gaelic original before him, containing the simile of the shield to a moon, would have omitted it in his version. In the subsequent edition of 1789, after he had time to embellish, he inserted "*his shield the rising moon*," which has accordingly been translated into the Gaelic, and presented to a credulous public, as the genuine original composition of Ossian!

## SECTION III.

*On the Imitations in Macpherson's Ossian.*

IN no place is Macpherson's Ossian more vulnerable than in his Imitations. These meet us in every page; they are visible to the most inexperienced eye, and assailable by the shafts of every young recruit of criticism. The defenders of Ossian are sensible of their weakness in this point, and accordingly exercise all their ingenuity to repel the attacks of their assailants. But in vain. Mr. Laing is an antagonist, whose keen and well tempered weapons they can neither blunt nor turn aside.

Macpherson has exercised considerable skill in some of his imitations, and employed much art to disguise them; but to hide was impossible. The prosaic form, which, for wise reasons, he preferred to rhyme, or legitimate blank verse, rendered them less liable to recognition. Even Gray, suspecting no fraud, did not at first discover that some of his own poetry had been transferred to the pages of Ossianic fiction. But Mr. Laing, though in his younger days he dreamed of nothing less than imposition, having his doubts once excited, entered on the inquiry, and pursued it with diligence and success, till it terminated in the clearest and strongest conviction. In the essay annexed to his History of Scotland, and in his edition of Macpherson's Ossian, he has shewn that many of the choicest flowers of the pretended Caledonian bard, notwithstanding their new arrangement and connexion, were the original property of the poets of Greece, and the prophets of Judea.



In reply to the objection founded on the imitations, Sir John Sinclair gives the following quotation from a literary journal: "That Mr. Macpherson in the *short space* of time in which he was employed in translating the works of Ossian, should have scraped together such a quantity of unconnected passages as it is contended he has done, and that he should by a hint taken from one author, and a word from another, have wrought up such uniform and beautiful descriptions, as that of the desert Balclutha for example, are facts utterly incredible."

We cannot see where the incredibility lies. Macpherson, as he himself confesses, "served an apprenticeship in secret to the muses," and that it was the usual length of apprenticeships, seven years at the least, may well be conceded. He had also received a classical education, taught the classics, and was therefore familiar with some of the principal authors of Greece and Rome. He wrote and published the poem of the Highlander, with other poems, and of course had his attention early turned to Highland scenery. Writing poetry was the favourite occupation of his life. What time he actually employed in fabricating Ossian, and in *scraping together* materials for the structure, has not been ascertained, nor is it a matter of any importance to learn. But that he did *scrape* from various quarters the great mass of his descriptions, it is marvellous incredulity to doubt. Many also had been his pioneers in the same employment, and when he did not choose to consult the original authors, he could find enough for his purpose, at second hand, in such productions as the *Gradus ad Parnassum*; *Flavissæ Poeticæ*; and in *Bysshe's* and *Gildon's Arts of Poetry*. Macpherson, in his preface, has asserted that "the making of poetry, like any other handicraft, may be learned by industry;" and his Ossian is exactly such a proof and illustration of his assertion as we should expect. It is a fine speci-

men of that *handicraft* poetry, which by some taste in the arts of joining and gluing, of dovetailing and varnishing, may be formed from the *membra disjecta* of other poets. No draught from Helicon, or inspiration from Urania is necessary to the artificer. He is the poet that is made, not born—an image of clay without the promethean fire—one of the *servum pecus* of Horace, not the *vates egregius* of Juvenal.

Cui non sit publica vena,  
Qui nihil expositum soleat deducere, nec qui  
Communi feriat carmen triviale moneta.

JUV. SAT. vii. 53.

Not HE, the bard of every age and clime,  
Of genius fruitful and of soul sublime,  
Who from the glowing mint of fancy pours  
No spurious metal fused from common ores,  
But gold, to matchless purity refined,  
And stamp'd with all the godhead in his mind.

GIFFORD.

Doctor Graham, as well as Sir John Sinclair's critic in the *Literary Journal*, thinks it incredible, that Macpherson could be the artificer of his curious poetical mosaic work. He expatiates on the university education of Macpherson: "his mind," says he, "was enriched with the *stores of ancient* and modern literature; he was familiarized from an early period of life to the modes of acting, and thinking, and expressing himself, which characterize the scholar of the present times. That a person of such education, and of such habits of thinking, should so completely divest himself of all his previous acquisitions in literature and science, and of every idea rendered familiar to him by long use; and that he should be able to write with uniform consistency, in the character of a person who is supposed to have lived fourteen hundred years ago, and in a state of society so very diffe-

rent from the present order of things ; in short, that a modern European should produce such a work as the poetry of Ossian, distinguished exclusively by the ideas peculiar to a people in the most simple state of society ; all these, *I confess*, I must consider as efforts beyond the reach of humanity."

From which confession we are obliged to infer that its author did not take sufficient pains to inform himself of what humanity is capable of effecting, or he would have considered the poetry which he eulogizes as within the compass of very ordinary powers. Indeed, had Macpherson been destitute of those literary stores, both ancient and modern, with which his mind was enriched, there would have been some validity in the argument. But as it is stated, the very premises expose the fallacy of the conclusion. Were it even true, which we are far from admitting, that the poetry is "distinguished exclusively by the ideas peculiar to a people in the most simple state of society ;" what would such a truth prove more than this, that the author had carefully observed those laws which the nature of his work required, and which he could not violate without shocking all probability ? A poet who sits down to write a pastoral, if he is not ignorant of his art, knows that he ought not, and of course will not, introduce ideas foreign to the pastoral life. He will not give his shepherds the manners of courtiers, nor present his goatherds disputing about metaphysics. The dramatic writer who lays his scene on the borders of the arctic circle, will be careful how he employs the imagery of the tropics. He is an unskilful artist who covers his canvas with incongruities, who paints a dolphin in the woods and a boar in the waves. Macpherson knew this well, and having fixed on an age and country for his pastoral epics, he exercised as much skill as he possessed to make his colouring and imagery correspond. But after all his care, he did not succeed so happily as to hide his artifice.



He endeavoured to form a statue of surpassing beauty, but failed in the execution. It proved to be the monster with the horse's head and the fish's tail, clothed with rich and gaudy plumage, contributed by all the birds of the air.

Doctor Graham assumes it as a fact not to be contested, that Macpherson's *Ossian* is a collection of super-excellent poetry; that it is perfectly inimitable; that the loftiest flights of Pindar, and the sustained sublimities of Homer, fall far below the elevated soarings of the Caledonian swan. Such extravagant panegyric amuses and disgusts by turns. That the poetry has beauties we do not deny; but that they are transplanted from a foreign soil, we should think apparent to every unprejudiced judge. Notwithstanding, Doctor Graham, and the critics of his school, labour industriously to shew that they are the indigenous growth of the Highlands, and that certain coincidences both of thought and expression, may be traced in authors who lived in ages and countries most remote from each other. There are passages in Homer, and in the Sacred Scriptures, which have a mutual resemblance, and yet no one will pretend that the one is an original, and the other an imitation. To illustrate this, the words of the Patriarch Jacob, "Ye will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave," are compared with those of Priam, lamenting for his son Hector, οὐ μ' ἄχος ὅξυ κατοίσεταί αἶδος εἰσω, "my sharp sorrow for whom will bring me down to the grave." A more apt illustration might have been selected. The thought in both passages is unquestionably similar. It is one of those common-place ideas which are to be found in all languages. But the dress and imagery in which it is arrayed in the Scriptures, make it peculiarly their own. In Homer, grief is the agent. In Scripture, the agents are the Patriarch's own sons, a consideration which must add poignancy to his grief, and heighten our sympathy. The *grey hairs* present us

with an image as pathetic as it is picturesque. There is nothing like it in Homer.

Graham argues with plausibility, that the aspect of external nature, and the constitution of the human mind, are every where the same, and that consequently we need not be surprised to meet parallelisms of thought and expression in different languages. This, to a certain extent, is admitted. But it is not for some casual coincidences, nor "vague similarities," as Doctor Graham is pleased to term Macpherson's plagiarisms, quoted by Mr. Laing, nor on principles like those by which Fluellan identified Macedonia and Monmouth, that the English Ossian is accused; but for broad, plain, palpable, and frequent imitation of thought, of diction, and even of singular structure of sentences. There are certain peculiarities of sentiment, of manners, of imagery and expression, which, belonging exclusively to one region, are no more to be expected in another, than rein deer on the sands of the torrid zone, or the elephant in Siberia. Who would not be amazed to hear the epics of Homer rhapsodized by a Celtic bard, or the Canticles of Solomon warbled forth in the songs of Selma?

We cannot attribute it to mere casual coincidence, that many of Ossian's similes have not only a general, but a very particular resemblance to those of the greatest poets, though presented to us in various guise, with different appendages, and in different colours. We might pass over the comparison of the two sons of Usnoth, to "two young trees in the valley, growing in a shower," though we can find something like it in Homer; and Fingal's question, "stand they like a silent wood?" and "the white-bosomed maids, beholding them above like a grove;" and again, in the same poem, Carthon, they "stood like a silent grove that lifts its head in Gormal." But what shall we say, when we find the same

comparison dilated into the following? “stood Erin’s few sad sons, like a grove through which the flame had rushed, hurried on by the winds of the stormy night; distant, withered, dark, they stand with not a leaf to shake in the gale;” and again, “Lochlin stands like a half consumed grove of oaks, when we see the sky through its branches, and the meteor passing behind.” We think we have seen the same grove of oaks before in a different scene, and though without the accompaniment of the sky, and the omnipresent Ossianic meteor, not less magnificent, nor less powerfully depicted; and we cannot resist the conviction, that we should never have seen it in Ossian, had it not previously appeared in Milton and Virgil.

Faithful how they stood,  
 Their glory withered, as when heaven’s fire  
 Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines;  
 With singed top their stately growth, though bare,  
 Stands on the blasted heath.

PAR. LOST, i. 611.

Virgil thus compares the Cyclops to a grove:

Ætnæos fratres, cœlo capita alta ferentes,  
 Concilium horrendum: quales cum vertice celso  
 Aëriæ quercus, aut coniferæ cyparissi  
 Constiterant, sylva alta Jovis, lucusve Dianæ.

ÆN. iii. 678.

The monstrous race we spy  
 A host of giants towering in the sky.  
 So on some mountain towers the lofty grove  
 Of beauteous Dian, or imperial Jove;  
 Th’ ærial pines in pointed spires from far,  
 Or spreading oaks majestic nod in air.\*

PITT.

\* Dryden, in his translation of these verses, becomes Ossianic in this line:

“The misty clouds about their foreheads fly.”



Doctor Graham seems to think there is no imitation where there is no repetition both of thought and expression. But he should have recollected that imitators often wish to pass for originals, and that it is part of their art to embellish the thoughts which they borrow, and give them such new colouring and construction as will best serve for disguise. We do not suppose, with Doctor Graham, that Mr. Laing intended any burlesque on criticism, when he said that Macpherson imitated Tibullus as well as Milton, in the following passage: "Loveliness was around her as light, her steps were the music of songs." And again, "awe moved around her stately steps, like two stars were her radiant eyes. If on the heath she moved, her breast was whiter than the down of Cana; if on the sea-beat shore, than the foam of the rolling ocean."

Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye,  
In every gesture dignity and love.

MILTON.

Illam quidquid agit, quoque vestigia movet,  
Componit furtim, subsequiturque decor.  
Seu solvit crines, fuis decet esse capillis:  
Seu compsit, comitis est veneranda comis.  
Urit, seu Tyria voluit procedere palla,  
Urit, seu nivea candida veste venit.

TIB. lib. 4.

"The lines of Tibullus," says Laing, "were certainly in Milton's contemplation. But his paraphrase is more literally transcribed by Macpherson." The similarity of the remaining part of the passage consists not in the imagery. We have neither the down of Cana, nor the foam of ocean in Tibullus, nor the Tyrian nor the snow-white robe in Ossian; yet are we clearly of opinion, that the latter has imitated the former, and that the modern Scotch is indebted to the ancient Roman poet for the "*peculiar construction*" of his sentence. The dress is Ossianic, the figure Latian.

To convince such sceptics as Doctor Graham, we shall produce a few examples in which the marks of imitation are still more decisive :

“Happy,” said the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, “are thy men, and happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom.”—2 Chron. ix. 7.

“Happy are thy people, O Fingal; thou art the first in their danger, the wisest in the days of their peace.”—Fingal, book v.

Micaiah the prophet says to Ahab, “I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have no shepherd.”—1 Kings, xxii. 17.

Hidallan, in Comala, says, “the nations are scattered on the hills!” Here Macpherson stopped short. The introduction of the pastoral simile did not suit the drama of a hunting age; besides, it would have too plainly discovered the source from which he drew.

The prophet Isaiah asks, “who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand?” and the spirit of Loda in Ossian echoes, “the blasts are in the hollow of my hand!”

Sternhold and Hopkins, in their translation of the first Psalm, say of the wicked, that

Like they are unto the chaff,  
Which wind drives to and fro.

And Macpherson in Cathloda repeats, “his words are wind—wind, that to and fro drives the thistle.” He could not say chaff, for that would indicate too improved a state of society for the age of his refined sentimental heroes.

Eliphaz in Job says of the wicked, “by the blast of God they perish; and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.”—Job. iv. 9.

The spirit of Loda re-echoes, "I look on the nations, and they vanish: my nostrils pour the blast of death."

The first clause reminds us of Psalm civ. 32. "He looketh on the earth, and it trembleth." Here Macpherson seems ambitious of excelling the inspired writer.

"The little hills," says the Psalmist, "rejoice on every side." "The hills of Inistore rejoiced," replies Macpherson, in Carrick-Thura.

Isaiah, in the spirit of prophecy, sings, "the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll;" and Macpherson rechants, "when the skies were rolled together, then thy feast was spread."—*Temora*, book iii.

"He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found," says Job, xx. 8-9.

"We shall pass away like a dream: the hunter shall not know the place of our rest," reiterates Macpherson: and again, in the *Songs of Selma*, he repeats the thought, "my life flies away like a dream: why should I stay behind?"

"We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled," says the Psalmist, Ps. xc. 7.; and Macpherson responds, "they were consumed in the flames of thy wrath."

A multitude of similar passages might be quoted, in which we at once perceive not only the ideas, but the very words of Scripture; and yet shall we be told they are not imitations? *Plagiarisms*, indeed, would be a more fitting appellation.

Macpherson appears to have been so familiar with the language of Scripture, that he frequently employs it, we should suppose, unconsciously; or with a marvellous carelessness or intrepidity of detection. Sometimes he conglomerates images and expressions from different passages; and works them up into one description. The



Song of Solomon, the Book of Isaiah, and the Psalms, have furnished him with many materials. But he does not confine himself to these. He levies contributions unsparingly from every part of the sacred volume, in which he can find any thing to suit his purpose.

“Who is this,” asks Solomon, “that cometh out of the wilderness like *pillars of smoke*? “Is that Cuthullin,” resounds Macpherson, “or a *pillar of smoke* on the heath?” Carthon is termed “a *pillar of fire*.” Solomon invokes the north and the south winds: “awake, O north wind, and come thou south.” And Macpherson has a similar invocation, “cease a little while, O wind! stream, be thou silent awhile!” and again, “arise, winds of autumn, arise!”

The following passages from Canticles, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, are frequently imitated. “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun.—Song of Sol. vi. 10. His locks are bushy, (or curled,) v. 11., as the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud *in the day of rain*.—Ez. i. 28. Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?—Is. lxiii. 1.

“Who,” asks Macpherson, “comes from the hill like a steed in his strength?—Who comes like a stag of the desert, with all his herd behind him?—Who comes towards my son with the murmur of a song?—Who cometh from the hill like a cloud, tinged with the beam of the west?—Who,” said the soft-voiced Carril, “who come like bounding roes?—Who comes from Lubar’s vale?—From the skirts of the morning mist?—Was he white as the snow of Ardven—blooming as the bow of the shower?—Was his hair like the mist of the hill, soft and curling *in the day of the sun*?—Who is that before them like the terrible course of a stream?—Who on his staff, is this?—Who comes from the land of strangers, with his thousands around him? \* \* \* \* Who is it but Comhal’s son?

Though Macpherson sometimes makes a change in the imagery of the sacred writers, who does not see at a glance, that his descriptions, as they were suggested, are also compounded of phrases sup-

plied by their compositions. Even the remarkable death of Absalom has not escaped him, for he tells us, that “Clonar is pierced by Cathmor, nor yet lay the chief on earth: *an oak scized his hair* in his fall.”—*Temora*, book viii. This Cathmor had his prototype in Homer’s *Axylus*.—*Il.* vi. 14. Who is described as

Φίλος ἀνθρώποισι  
Παντας γὰρ Φιλεσκεν, ὁδῷ ἐπὶ οἰκίᾳ ναιῶν.

A friend to human race,  
Fast by the road his ever open door,  
Obliged the wealthy and relieved the poor.

POPE.

But Macpherson was determined that his hero should exceed Homer’s, and accordingly he assures us, that “seven paths led to his halls. Seven chiefs stood on the paths, and called the stranger to the feast! But Cathmor dwelt in the wood to shun the voice of praise!”—*Temora*, book i.

What generous hospitality in a hunting age, when venison was the only food! What delicate refinement of soul to withdraw from the loud huzzas of the people, or “the applause of listening senates,” was it? to dwell in the wood while his seven chiefs presided at the feast, and, from flowing shells, drank deep to the health of their munificent, but, ah! too sensitive benefactor? But notwithstanding his extreme sensibility, he was a “high-bounding king, who hewed down the ridge of shields,” and performed for Clonar the same office as Job performed for Absalom! “Clonar is pierced by Cathmor!” Justice, however, compels us to admit that this deed was prior to the seizure of the unhappy warrior’s hair by the oak.

Virgil describes *Acestes* as coming down from the top of a mountain, roughly clad in the skin of a Libyan bear:

"Vertice montis ;

\* \* \* \* \*

Horridus in jaculis, et pelle Libystidis ursæ."

ÆN. v. 35.

And Macpherson informs us, that "Arindal descended from the hill, rough in the spoils of the chase." Would it not have been better to have rolled him in the folds of a bear-skin at once? Yes, but then the imitation had been too visible ; and though such a dress was suitable enough for one of Virgil's heroes, it was too barbarous for a hero of Ossian !

The imitations from Gray are equally striking :

"Nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he."

Macpherson reiterates, "nor by the rock, nor by the stream is he," preserving the very measure and cadence of the line : and again, "nor by that stream nor (by that) wood are they."

Gray says at the beginning of one of his sublime odes :

"Ruin seize thee ruthless king !  
Confusion on thy banners wait !"

And Comala exclaims, "confusion pursue thee over thy plains ; ruin overtake thee, thou king of the world !"

Gray had written :

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Macpherson, to emulate these lines, writes of "the flower of the rock that lifts its fair head unseen ; and strews its withered leaves in the blast."



Graham says, that “this image surpasses that of Catullus :

“*Flos in septis, secretis nascitur hortis,*”

in point of appropriate elegance, but it may, perhaps, be allowed to be inferior to Gray’s !” But he treats with scorn the idea that it is an imitation from Gray. For why ? an imitator would in this instance, probably, have chosen “Strews fragrance” instead of “Strews withered leaves !”

Macpherson says to a star, “the waves come around thee with joy ; they *bathe* thy lovely hair !”

But Homer had written before him of a star that was bathed in the ocean, *λελεμενος ωκεανοιο*, and Virgil of the morning star, *per-fusus Lucifer unda*.—ÆN. viii. 589; a passage which Scaliger alleges to be sweeter than ambrosia. *Profecto ne ambrosia quidem dulcior est*.—Poetices, Lib. v. p. 572.

So *bathed* in ocean, with a vivid ray,  
Flames the refulgent star that leads the day.

PITT.

So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore,  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.

MILTON’S LYCIDAS.

Æneas thrice invokes the manes of Deiphobus, “*magna manes ter voce vocavi*.”—ÆN. vi. 506. And Macpherson makes his heroes say, “we *thrice* called the ghosts of our fathers.” He appears like the God in Virgil to have rejoiced in the number three ; “*Numero Deus impare gaudet* ;”—Ecl. viii. 75, for he says, “Trenmore sighed *thrice* over the hero—*thrice* the winds of the night roared around—and Cairbar *thrice* stroked his beard !”

Doctor Graham is indignant at Mr. Laing for asserting that the comparison of Clessamor to a steed in his strength, is a literal and wretched transcript from Pope's translation of the same simile in Homer. We agree with Laing, and wonder how any one pretending to the name of critic, can for a moment question the justice of his assertion. He has also shewn perfectly to our satisfaction, and we should think of every impartial judge, that all the elements of the celebrated address to the sun, may be found in *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Home's Douglas*, *Addison's Cato*, *Pope's Rape of the Lock*, and the *Sacred Scriptures*; and those of the description of *Balclutha* in *Hosea*, *Lamentations* and *Zephaniah*. The image of the fox looking out of the windows, is taken from the voice of the cormorant and bittern singing in the windows, *Zeph. ii. 14*, combined with an image from *Pope's Windsor Forest*:

“The *Fox* obscene to gaping tombs retires,  
And savage howlings fill the sacred choirs.”

No one was such a perfect master as Macpherson of the art of selecting images and poetical ideas from various sources, and of disguising and combining them in altered forms. He stole the colours which he deemed most beautiful from every pallet, and hoped by his dexterity in compounding them, in spreading them on his poetical canvas, and wrapping his pictures in *Caledonian mist*, that they would be mistaken for originals; and that no eagle-eyed critic like Laing, would be able to detect the theft. *Cacus* dragged the bulls and cows of *Hercules* into his den by the tail, to prevent discovery, *ne qua forent pedibus vestigia rectis*. But an unfortunate bellow betrayed the robber, and though he had the art to involve himself and his cavern in dense darkness, *cæca caligine*, he could not escape the vengeance of the exasperated hero:

Panditur extemplo foribus domus atra revulsis;  
 Abstractæque boves, abjuratæque rapinæ  
 Cælo ostenduntur,

VIRG. ÆN. viii. 262.

The God then burst the gates; and open lie  
 The den's vast depths, all naked to the sky:  
 Th' expanded caves dismiss th' imprison'd prey,  
 From the black darksome dungeon to the day.

PITT.

### IMITATIONS FROM SCRIPTURE.

JOB, in one of his most sublime passages, says, "a spirit passed before my face," iv. 15.; and Macpherson introduces one of his ghosts in almost the same words: "a thin form passed before me."

"Ye shall seek me and shall not find me."

JOHN, vii. 34.

"The maids shall seek thee on the heath, but they shall not find thee."

MACPHERSON.

"That field was called the field of blood unto this day."

MAT. xxvii. 8.

"She (Grudar) mourned him in the field of blood."

FINGAL, book i.

"Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills."

Ps. l. 10.

"Comhal was the chief of a hundred hills;  
 His deer drank of a thousand streams!"

FINGAL, ii.



"The earth was without form, and void."

GEN. i. 2.

"His face is without form, and dark."

WAR OF CAROS.

"Who maketh the clouds his chariot."

PS. civ. 3.

"Two dark clouds that are the chariots of ghosts."

FINGAL, book 3.

"Then shall thy light break forth as the morning."

ISAIAH, lviii. 8.

"Then shall my soul come forth like a light from the gates of the morn."

TEMORA, book viii., note second.

"The *little hills* rejoice on every side."

PS. lxxv. 12.

"The isles that are in the sea shall be *troubled*."

EZ. xxvi. 18.

"The *little hills* are *troubled* before him."

LATHMON.

"From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty."

2 SAM. i. 22.

"His spear never returned unstained with blood; nor his bow from the strife of the mighty."

DEATH OF CUTHULLIN.

"When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me, and hid themselves."

JOB, xxix. 7, 8.

"Dost thou not see, O Gaul! how the steps of my age are honoured? Morna moves forth, and the *young men* meet him with awe, and turn their eyes with silent joy on his course."

LATHMON.

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, \* \* \* and as the showers upon the grass."

DEUT. xxxii. 2.

"My words are pleasant as the shower which falls on the sunny field."

FINGAL, book v.

#### MISCELLANEOUS IMITATIONS.

"Nisus ait : Dii ne hunc ardorem mentibus addunt  
Euryale? an sua cuique Deus fit dira cupido?  
Aut pugnam, aut aliquid jamdudum invadere magnum  
Mens agitat mihi; nec placidâ contenta quiete est.  
Cernis, quæ Rutulos habeat fiducia rerum:  
Lumina rara micant: somno vinoque soluti  
Procubuere: silent late loca."

VIRG. ix. 184.

"SON of Fingal! he said, why burns the soul of Gaul? My heart beats high. My steps are disordered; my hand trembles on my sword. When I look towards the foe my soul lightens before me. I see their sleeping host. Tremble thus the souls of the valiant in battles of the spear?"—LATHMON.

The episode of Gaul and Ossian, in the Poem of Lathmon is copied from that of Nisus and Euryalus in Virgil, with such variations as the author supposed most likely to throw a *column of mist* over his plagiarisms. The Trojan heroes slay their foes sleeping, but the more generous Gael, disdaining to steal a victory, strike their bossy shields in the camp of their enemies, that they may be slaughtered awake. Anxious to see how the Latin translation of this poem would appear beside the strains of the Mantuan bard, we suffered great disappointment on finding that it is not inserted in Sir John Sinclair's volumes. Why this omission?

L

"Hæ tibi erunt artes ; pacisque imponere morem,  
Parcere subjectis, et debellare superbos."

VIRG.

"O Oscar, bend the strong in arm, but spare the feeble hand."

FINGAL, book iii.

"Ossian be thou a storm in war, but mild when the foe is low."

CALTHON AND CONMAL.

"Smooth-sliding without step."

MILTON.

"Its large limbs did not move in steps."

CARTHON.

"Penthesilea furens, *mediisque in millibus* ardet."

VIRG.

"Fierce Cairbar roared in the midst of thousands."

MACPHERSON.

"Like a *broad shield* amid the watry waste."

POPE'S ODYSSEY.

"On the third day arose Tromathon, like a *blue shield* in the midst of the sea."

OITHONA.

"*Skirted* his loins and thighs with downy *gold*."

MILTON.

"A sun-beam was on his *skirts* ; they glittered like the *gold* of the stranger."

MACPHERSON.

part huge of bulk

"Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait  
Tempest the ocean."

PAR. LOST, book vii. 410.

"The waves sport *unwieldy* round with all their backs of foam."

TEMORA, book viii.

"Windy Troy."

HOM.

"Windy Temora."

MACPHERSON.



“Where were ye, nymphs, when the remorseless deep  
 Closed o’er the head of your loved Lycidas?  
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,  
 Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie, &c.”

MILTON’S LYCIDAS.

Imitated from VIRGIL, ECL. x. 9, and THEOCRITUS, IDYL. i. 66.

“Where have ye been, ye southern winds! when the sons of my love were deceived?  
 But ye have been sporting on the plain, pursuing the thistle’s beard.”

DARTHULA.

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A multitude of imitations might be added to these, but we are unwilling to exhaust the patience of the reader.

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## SECTION IV.

### *Of the Argument founded on the Excellence of the Poetry.*

THE supposed excellence of Macpherson’s poems, is with some a good argument in favour of their authenticity:

“To suppose,” says Blair, “that two or three hundred years ago, when we well know the Highlands to have been *in a state of gross ignorance* and barbarity, there should have arisen in that country a poet of such exquisite genius, and of such deep knowledge of mankind and of history, as to divest himself of the ideas and manners of his own age, and to give us a just and natural picture of a state of society ancients by a thousand years; one who could support this counterfeited antiquity, through such a large collection of poems, without the least inconsistency; and who, possessed of all this genius and art, had at the same time the self-denial of concealing himself, and of ascribing his own work to an antiquated bard, without the imposture being detected, is a supposition that transcends all bounds of credibility.”

Graham follows Blair, and says :

“ If it be ascertained that these poems were composed by a contemporary, imbued as Mr. Macpherson certainly was, in a very respectable measure, with the literature of Greece and Rome, as well as of modern times, we are presented with a phenomenon still more inexplicable. That such a person should have produced a body of poetry, which has been justly considered as possessing so high a merit, ‘ as to have given a new tone to poetry throughout Europe ;’\* but at the same time devoid of all modern allusion, and formed neither in its imagery or expression on the model of those ancient authors, who have communicated their peculiar colouring so generally, to all modern compositions, appears to be a circumstance still more strange, than the supposition of the high antiquity which has been ascribed to it.”†

Sir John Sinclair re-echoes the same sentiments. He has laboured to prove—

“ 1st, That the poems of Ossian are authentic ancient poetry ; and 2nd, That in a remote period of our history, the mountains of Scotland produced a bard whose works must render his name immortal, and whose genius has not been surpassed by the efforts of any modern or even ancient competitor.”

Elsewhere we find these poems extolled as equal or superior to Homer and Virgil, or if in any respect they are inferior to those of the father of poetry, their tasteful defender can account for their inferiority ! But notwithstanding the extravagant eulogies of Blair, Graham, the Edinburgh Reviewers, and Sir John Sinclair ; Homer, nay even Virgil, still holds a distinguished pre-eminence over Macpherson. Had the poems of the latter been left to rest on their own intrinsic merit, they would long since have sunk into oblivion. They derived whatever interest they possessed from their supposed antiquity ; and Hume, as has been already noticed, stated truly to Blair, that notwithstanding all the *varnish* with which he covered them, they would fall into discredit, unless their authenticity were proved. Accord-

\* Edinburgh Review, No. XII. Art. 7.

† Graham’s Introduction, pp. vii. viii.

ingly they have been gradually declining in public estimation, and are regarded now only as a curious imposition, deriving an adventitious interest from the literary controversies to which they have given birth.

The question recurs, if they were not original, is it to be supposed that Macpherson could compose them? Why not? Why should not Macpherson have as much genius as the son of Fin Mac-Cumhal? He had certainly infinitely more literary advantages. The stores of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, and English poetry, were open to him, and from all of them he drew as liberally as if they were his own exclusive property. Every page of his poems bears evidence of his industry in collecting and disposing his borrowed materials. He has recast and disguised them, to be sure, and intermingled them with some foreign ingredients. Instead of the rude Cyclopean architecture of the ancient Celts, he has presented us with a new composite order of his own construction, which deserves to be named the *Macphersonian*. His poems have the same relation to Homer and Virgil, that a Highland shieling has to the Parthenon or Colosseum.

By a curious kind of fatality, the defenders of the authenticity of Ossian, almost always furnish arguments for their own confutation. Thus, after stating the impossibility of any genius of modern times equalling the old Celtic bard, they tell us that the Ossianic poetical temperament still prevails in the Highlands to such a degree, that we should not be surprised to hear of a whole clan of Ossians.

“Even in the Highlanders of the present day, whose characters,” says Graham, “have not undergone a change by the contact of foreign manners, we may still trace the mode of thinking and acting which distinguishes the personages of Ossian. Accustomed to traverse vast tracts of country, which have never been subjected to the hand of art; contemplating every day the most diversified scenery; surrounded every where by wild and magnificent objects; by mountains, and lakes, and forests, the mind of the Highlander is expanded, and partakes in some measure of the rude sublimity of the objects with which he is conver-



sant. Pursuing the chase in regions not peopled according to their extent, he often finds himself alone in the gloomy desert, or by the margin of the dark frowning deep ; his imagination tinged with pleasing melancholy, finds society in the passing breeze, and he beholds the airy forms of his fathers descending on the skirts of the cloud. When the tempest howls over the heath, and the elements are mixed in dire uproar, he recognizes the angry spirit of the storm, and he retires to his secret cave. Such is at this day, the tone of mind which characterises the Highlander, who has not lost the distinctive marks of his race by commerce with strangers; and such too is the picture which has been drawn by Ossian.”\*

After this, who shall venture to contend against the possibility of the Highlands, even in modern times, producing some genius of equal or superior lustre to all its former luminaries ?

Among the notices of the principal Gaelic books, published during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, p. 562, vol. iii. of Sir John Sinclair’s edition of Ossian, is the following :

“ *A Collection of Poems by Duncan Mac-Intyre of Glenurchy, Argyllshire 1768, 8vo.* Mac-Intyre, though an illiterate man, holds place among the first of modern Bards ; his poem on the summer is beautiful and energetic, equal to any thing in Thomson’s Seasons ; his panegyric on Beindouran, (a hill above Glenurchy,) excels every thing of this kind ; his *Mam-Lorn*, or *Coire cheathaich*, and *Coire gorm au fhasaich*, are admired by every Celtic scholar, who takes pleasure to see nature painted in the liveliest colours.”

This notice forcibly corroborates the presumption of the editor of the *Ogygia Vindicated*, that “no man will deny that a Highland bard of the last or present century, may not possess as much poetical fire as the son of Fingal, or any other illiterate bard in Fingal’s army;”† especially, it might be added, if his natural fire was heightened, and his taste improved like Macpherson’s, by close familiarity with the Scriptures, and the English, Greek, and Roman classics.

Some Irish poets of modern times might contest the palm with the most celebrated poets of antiquity. Mr. O’Reilly informs us of

\* Graham’s Essay, pp. 28, 29.

† Editor’s Preface, p. 15.

Denis M'Namara, a school-master of the county of Waterford, 1755, "who wrote a mock Æneid in Irish, in which there are some lines by no means inferior to any of Virgil's. The shout of Charon, as described by the Irish bard, is, perhaps, superior to the Cyclops' roar of the Mantuan poet." Again he speaks of M'Auliffe, a blacksmith, near Glanmire, county of Corke, author of some poems, in which "he describes the river Funshan in a storm, where his "Ḥḡan ḡoḡac ḡaḡḡa a ḡcaḡḡom na ḡḡoḡ" is not inferior to Homer's description of the rolling waves, in the 4th book of the Iliad."

Blair, endeavouring to support the authenticity of the poems by internal evidence, says, "they have all the characters of antiquity impressed upon them;" he should have subjoined, recast in a modern mould, and with new characters impressed upon them, which antiquity would disown. "The heroes," says he, "prepare their own repasts."—Yes, this is hinted at, but Macpherson dared not venture, as the father of poets has done, minutely to describe the process of cutting the throat, of flaying, of separating the joints, and fixing them on spits. He was afraid to come down from his bombast, or depart from his generalities, to give us a true picture of the manners of his adopted age. We can learn nothing from him unless it be in a note, in what mode the repast was prepared, though we learn it distinctly from other sources. A common culinary operation was beneath the dignity of Macpherson, and perhaps above his powers, without his degenerating into meanness. We think some of those damsels whom he dresses so frequently in mail, would have been as well, as naturally, and as agreeably to the manners of the age, employed in hospitable cares at home, as in wandering to secret caves, and indulging a whining sentimentality with blue-eyed heroes.

Again, says Blair, "no foreign ornaments are hunted after;" and hence an argument in favour of the antiquity of the poems. But

more weight has been laid on it, than it will sustain. Certainly, we are warranted in affirming, that no poet can employ ornaments or images to which he is a total stranger. He who never saw or heard of a lion, could never think of comparing a hero to that formidable animal. But nothing is more common than to borrow imagery and description from foreign sources. Their novelty recommends them, and why not adopt them, as we adopt historical and geographical facts, from the authority of others? Homer never saw a Chimæra, nor the monsters that barked around Scylla. But he had heard of them, and placed them among his *miracula speciosa*. On the supposition that Macpherson's Ossian did write the poems ascribed to him, he might have employed Roman imagery, and allusions to Roman history, customs, encampments, marches, battles, not only with manifest propriety, but with great advantage to his credibility. For the heroes whose exploits he sings, and in whose renown he shared, overcame the king of the world, and took spoil from the strangers! Why does he not dwell on these facts, and tell us the names of some of the Roman captives, for the Celtic heroes were too generous to put all their prisoners to the sword? Were they also too generous to wear their arms, to erect trophies of their spears and shields, or to breathe in their songs of triumph a hint of the dismay which would pervade "the eternal city," on hearing of the overthrow of her legions by the victorious arms of the Gael? If "no foreign ornaments are sought after," how did "*showers of blood—and gates of brass*, (See Lathmon, vol. i. p. 273,)—*thunders in the bosom of the ground, and earthquakes that shake the green-vallied Erin from sea to sea*," find their way into the compositions of the Celtic poet? Whence the Christian benedictions which he sometimes puts into the mouth of his heroes? Whence "*the spirit of heaven*," and "*the vapours of death*"—with the apples of gold, the sparkling wine, and the gem-studded cups, that gladdened the kings of the world?



"In the battles," says our critic, "it is evident that drums, trumpets, and bagpipes were not known nor used."

No, Macpherson's fear of committing an anachronism of this kind, though he has not scrupled to commit others far more flagrant, induced him sometimes to use too much caution. He knew well that the introduction of a band of music would be as bad as the Trojan hero's quotation from Aristotle, in Shakspeare. The art of criticism was better understood in his days than in those of our great dramatist. Yet, perhaps, he might have introduced the bagpipe without hazard of censure. It would have been characteristic; but from an excess of prudence, or deeming the bagpipe's notes barbarous, and little accordant with the refined taste of his heroes and heroines, he declined the use of an instrument capable of stirring the most heart-thrilling emotions in the breast of a modern Highlander. From the writings of great poets we can gather much information relative to the state of the arts, sciences, and peculiar customs of the age which they describe, or in which they wrote. But what do we learn from Macpherson's *Ossian*?—literally nothing. When Homer describes a funeral, he gives a faithful picture of the rites and ceremonies employed on the occasion. In *Ossian's* burials there is not a single circumstance peculiar or characteristic, if we except the song of the bards, and the placing the horn of a deer or a sword by the side of the entombed. This defect in the real *Ossian* would be unaccountable or inexcusable, for we elsewhere learn that heroes were interred "standing in arms, face to face, with their weapons ready,"\* a peculiarity susceptible of pathetic description, and which the genuine bard would not omit. But the omission by Macpherson is capable of easy explanation. Indeed the absence of ancient Celtic

\* See *Antiquarian Researches*, by Sir William Betham, p. 356.

ideas and images is tenfold more striking and conclusive against the authenticity of the poems, than the absence of modern ornaments would be favourable to its establishment. It demonstrates that the author did not write in the age nor in the scenes with which he pretends to be familiar. He speaks of the sun and moon, of seas, rivers, and lakes, of mountains and valleys, and gives us a superabundance of rainbows and poetic mists. But where are the badgers and the otters of the Fenian Tales; and the bears and the wolves? Of these there were numbers in the Highlands, and also squirrels, (as we are informed in Sir John Sinclair's third volume, p. 523,) though now nearly extinct, near Cona, the Fingallian river. "The country being at that time overrun with woods, afforded shelter to wolves and bears, enemies to the human race, and they had no other place of safety for their residence, but either in their caves or upon the tops of the hills," (Id. p. 539.) Those ferocious bears of Caledonia, and the wild bulls with thick manes, of which Martial and Plutarch speak, (Camden, Scotland, p. 31,) would have supplied some poetic pictures, and suggested themes of heroic enterprize. There is indeed one lachrymose reference to a bull in the first book of Fingal. "But, ah! why ever lowed the bull on Golbun's echoing heath. They saw him leaping like snow;" and again, in the second book, we are told of a division of "the herd on the hill." But we read of none of those grand *forays*, which, in succeeding ages, became so common that no Highland chieftain could say of his neighbours, what Achilles says of the Trojans:

Οὐ γὰρ πωποτ' ἑμᾶς βούς ἤλασαν, οὐδὲ μὲν ἵππους.

IL. α. l. 154.

Such exploits would have been unworthy of the civilization and refinement of Ossian's heroes, though it seems they never planted a grain

of corn, nor would they have known the strange exotic had it been presented to their view! Herds of goats and cows seeking shelter, are placed by Blair among the images which “betray a later period of society,” as if ever there was an age in which goats and kine were not gregarious, or inclined to seek shelter! The same critic ranks “*windows clapping*” first in the list of those modern images, forgetful, no doubt, that he has quoted with high approbation, and as a specimen of the real antique, a passage in which “the fox looked out from the windows.” Now, if windows afforded a looking-place to the fox, why might they not also *clap*, without losing their claims to antiquity?

Pennant, in his *Tour to Scotland*, note, vol. i. pp. 216, 217, says:

“It is to me a matter of surprise, that no mention is made in the poems of Ossian, of our great beasts of prey which must have abounded in his days, for the wolf was a pest to the country so late as the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the bear existed there till the year 1057, when a Gordon, for killing a fierce bear, was directed by King Malcolm III, to carry three bears’ heads in his banner.—Hist. Gordons, i. p. 2. Other native animals are often mentioned in several parts of the work; and in the five little poems on night, the compositions of as many bards, every modern British beast of chase is enumerated; the howling dog and howling fox described, yet the howling wolf omitted, which would have made the bards’ night much more hideous.”

But what we want in wolves and bears is amply supplied by dark brown deer, and dogs, “the long-bounding sons of the chace.—A thousand dogs fly off at once, gray-bounding through the heath. A deer fell by every dog; three by the white-breasted Bran!” Fingal vi. This was a glorious chace, to which the hunting of “Percy of Northumberland in the Scottish woods,” was a mere bagatelle. A thousand and three deer in one hunt! What Asiatic prince ever equalled this? Even Nimrod must own himself surpassed, and the country must have been covered with deer, as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa.



But Macpherson, it seems, falls short of his Gaelic original, which lets loose three thousand dogs, and each dog kills a brace of deer; and Bran, though but a whelp, killed one more than any of them; so that six thousand and one deer must have fallen!

Leig sinn ar tri mile cu  
Bu mhor lugh is bu gharg.  
Is mharbh gach cu dhiubh da fhiadh.

We let loose our three thousand hounds,  
That excelled in fleetness as in fierceness,  
And each hound killed two deer.

REP. HIGH. Soc. p. 258.

Well might Doctor O'Connor exclaim:

"Faustam quidem dies! Æneas esuriens *septem* tantum cervos in Libya occidit, miser!  
Si sorte ei evenisset Scotiam adire!"

The pretended original Gaelic of the foregoing passage, as published in Sir John Sinclair's volumes, differs very considerably from the Highland Society's version, being translated with more fidelity from the English Ossian:

Chaidh mile cu air falbh san fhraoch  
Thuit fiadh air a thaobh ro' gach cu.

Thus rendered by the Latin translator:

Canes mille exsoluti sunt in erica  
Eversusque est cervus in latus a singulo cane.

We observe a similar difference in the description of Fingal's standard in the two versions of the Highland Society and Sir John

Sinclair. The former has more the appearance of an original, being brief and simple compared with the latter, which is amplified, and translated verbatim from Macpherson's English.

*Highland Society's ancient Gaelic.*

Thog sinn Deo-greine re crann  
Bratach Fhinn 's bu gharbh a greas  
Lomlan do chlachaibh ann or,  
'S ann linn fein bu mhor a meas.

*Translation by Doctor Donald Smith.*

We reared the sun-beam to its staff,  
The standard of Fingal of furious sweep,  
Full-studded with stones in gold ;  
With us it was held in high respect.

HIGH. SOC. REPORT, p. 249.

*Macpherson's Gaelic.*

Thog sinn Deo-greine ri crann  
A bhratach mhor aig righ nan lann  
Bha solas an anam gach triath  
'Nuair thog i a sgiath ri gaoith.  
Bha 'gorm-shlios ballach le h-or  
Mar shlighe ghlais mhoir na h-oidhch'  
'Nuair sheallas na reil' o n' speur.

*Macfarlan's Latin Translation.*

Ereximus nos jubar solis in arboreo hastili  
Vexillum magnum regis gladiatorum ;  
Fuit lætitia in animo cujusque principis  
Quando elevata est ejus ala ad ventum.  
Fuit ejus (vexilli) cærum latus bullatum  
auro  
Instar conchæ canæ magnæ noctis,  
Quando despiciunt stellæ e cœlo.

SIR JOHN SINCLAIR'S OSSIAN,  
vol. ii. pp. 170-171.

We were rather startled on finding the Roman architectural idea of the shell of the azure vault of the sky, *concha cærulea* in the Celtic bard ; the *concha* being a species of fornix or cambered roof, " which, like a trumpet, grows wider as it lengthens." The testudo, or tortoise *shell*, also gave a name to the arched dome of temples : thus, Dido sat *media testudine templi*. The idea was transferred to the arched vault of heaven, and hence Macpherson's "blue wide shell of the nightly sky," translated into Gaelic, "*shlighe ghlais mhoir na h-oidhch* !"\* But we might have reserved our admiration

\* Laing has observed, "as each language has certain metaphorical idioms, easily distinguished when transferred to another ; a *chest* applied to the human trunk or chest, or a trunk

for the royal palace which the Highland Society has presented to us in the verses of some Ossianic school-master, "*versibus a quodam Ludimagistro compositis*," as Doctor O'Connor remarks. He further observes, that if Fingal, when he slew the six thousand and one deer, had not the good fortune of Æneas, to see the citadel of Carthage, with its rising walls, and the temple of Juno, of which "on brazen steps the marbled threshold rose," he beheld a royal palace of superior magnificence, indicative of all the wealth of Pygmalion.

Fosgailear an grianan corr  
Bha ar a thugha le cloimh ian,  
Bha comlaichean ris do'n or bhuidh  
Agus ursanan fo fhiundrain.

The chamber so highly prized is opened,  
It was covered above with the down of birds,  
Its doors were yellow with gold,  
And the side posts were of polished bone.

RFP. HIGH. SOC. pp. 236, 237.

Doctor O'Connor's translation follows :

"Aperitur Regia magnifica  
Cujus laqueare coopertum *plumis avium* !  
Portæ ejus *auro fulvo cælatae*  
Et postēs ex *ossibus limatis* !

inversely to a chest, is peculiar to the English ; the wing of a house or of an army, is adopted from the Latin ; the wings of the morning and of the winds, from Scripture. But that Ossian anticipating the English idiom (term,) should employ *cliadh* a basket, literally the same with *cista*, for the human chest, will be believed only by those who are already persuaded that the rustling wing of the blast preceded the translation of the Psalms into Earse." Doctor Graham flatly contradicts Mr. Laing, and says, that *cliadh* is neither literally nor metaphorically the same with *Cista*. Who shall decide ? our Latin dictionaries render *cista* a chest, a basket, a maund, (i. e. a great basket,) a pannier ; and our Irish render *cliadh* a basket, a cage, the trunk of a man or beast. There is evidently then *some* similarity between the terms ; the last meaning of the Irish word is clearly metaphorical, but whether its application in this sense be borrowed or original, we shall not affirm. But we feel pretty confident that "*shlighe ghlais mhoir na h-oidhche*," is a novel idea in the Gaelic language. The only idea we apprehend, which it would convey to a hero of the times of old, would be that of one of the conchs employed at the nightly feast of shells.



What pity the author did not say elephant or ivory in place of bone! It would have been as easy for him to bring that precious spoil from Hindostan or Ceylon, as to cross the Atlantic to the grand temple of Mexico, or the palace of Montezuma, for the plumage of birds\* to adorn the royal palace of *tufted* Morven!

Blair places the absence of religious ideas among the proofs of Ossian's *authenticity*; but if he had said of *forgery*, he would have approached nearer the truth. There has never been any state of society in which poetry was cultivated, from which religious ideas were excluded. The first and most sublime efforts of the muses in every country, and in every age, are devotional. Urania takes the precedence of all the Nine. Hesiod and Homer are full of religion, to say nothing of the hymns attributed to Orpheus. The Fenian tales also have numerous religious ideas, and a passage in the poem of the Chase would do no dishonour to the most distinguished Christian poet. Saint Patrick chides Oisín for comparing Fionn with the God of the Christians.

“Cease, cease thy strain, nor longer dare  
Thy Fionn, chief of chiefs, compare  
With him who reigns enthroned in light,  
The King of kings, of matchless might.  
'Tis he who framed the heaven and earth;  
'Tis he who nerves the hero's hand;  
'Tis he who calls fair flowers to birth,  
And bids each blooming branch expand.  
He gives the fishy streams to run,  
And lights the moon and radiant sun.

It did not suit Macpherson's plan to admit any thing like this. He has guarded as carefully as he could against the introduction of

\* See De Solis.

Christian sentiments; but, as Shaw long since observed, has not always succeeded, for in *Temora* we find the Christian expressions, "*peace to thy soul*,"—"blest be thy soul." He could not, however, well dispense with all machinery, and accordingly availed himself of the "popular superstition of the Highlands respecting ghosts, second sight, and the eternal agencies of the devil, whom he transforms into the spirit of Loda," invests with omnipotence, and describes as having the blasts "*in the hollow of his hand!*"

Enchantment and magic act a distinguished part in the early History of Ireland. They are employed in the Fenian Tales, and had probably great influence among all the Celtic tribes. Why has Macpherson rejected their aid? He might have used them in *Temora* at least, the scene of which lies in Erin, with propriety and success. He had antiquity on his side, in the History of the Tuatha De Danans, and a sanction for their poetical agency in the examples of Theocritus, Virgil, and Lucan. But he wished to avoid collision with the Fenian Tales, and was contented with ghosts, which he deemed more exclusively his own. These he could manage as he pleased. They came and departed at his beck, shrieking, roaring, and "riding on the wings of the wind!"

When he speaks so frequently of the halls of Selma, of the four grey stones of renown, and of the narrow house, it seems strange that he has omitted all mention of vitrified towers. These would have furnished almost as fine a theme to the poet as the Druidical fires of Beltein and Samhuin. "The remains of several of these towers, says Smith, in his Dissertation, p. 114, still to be seen in the Highlands, seem to prove that the inhabitants of those countries enjoyed even the comforts of life in a period more remote than the age of Fingal, or the invasion of the Romans, as no such mode of architecture has been since practised."

He also carefully avoids all allusion to the Ogham inscriptions, still to be found upon rocks, and to the military game of chess, in which the Fenian warriors delighted, and of which particular mention is made in the old Irish tale of the three sons of Usnach, a tale well known to Macpherson. He probably thought the game of too modern invention for the age of his poems, though had he been as familiar with the Odyssey as with the Iliad, he might have found that its introduction would expose him to no hazard of an anachronism.

Blair mentions it as a merit, that he particularizes his mountains, seas, and lakes, though noticed only in a simile; "it is the hill of Cromla, the storm of the sea of Malmor, or the reeds of the lake of Lego." On this Shaw justly observes, "the author surely would not be so uncircumspect as to use the name of Parnassus, Scylla, and Charybdis, or the reeds of the Red Sea. This is no more than what every poet, and in every country, has done; and this *internal* evidence proves nothing."

Lord Kames was a strenuous defender of the authenticity of Ossian, and being a critic of taste, he quotes a great variety of passages as illustrative of *the manners*. "If all," says he, "were not genuine, *the cloven foot* would some where peep out."\* And so it does, and the horns and the tail too, till the whole father of lies becomes apparent, though thickly clad in Caledonian mist. Some of the very passages quoted by his Lordship, belong to the sacred Scriptures, and rise conspicuous, in characters of light, to proclaim whence they were stolen. Blair says well, that Macpherson does not *borrow*. No, he clandestinely and surreptitiously takes "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold and raiment," and spoils his neighbours, and offers the spoil to an old Irish bard, with whose fame he wishes to identify his own, but who indignantly scorns the alliance and the offering.

\* Kames' Sketches, vol. i. p. 245.



“By many,” says Shaw, “it hath been said that the similes of Ossian are taken from so remote a period of society, as to be a strong proof of the antiquity of the poem. I grant the similes in general are from nature. And why? Because the country described as the scene of action at this day, and its inhabitants, are in some degree but emerging from a state of nature. \* \* \* \* Any Englishman may go down, and see those phenomena in the elements and face of the country; of which he may lay up a number, and write when he comes home, poetry of the same nature. This indeed has already been done at home, without the trouble of travelling.”\*

True, we need not travel to the Highlands to find similes from nature, nor was it necessary for Macpherson to put himself to the trouble and expense of such a journey for such a purpose, since he had similes enough ready prepared in his library, some of which he might long have sought for in vain, either in echoing Morven, or in “the green vallied Erin, when it shakes its mountains from sea to sea.” Happily, cold-hearted critics like ourselves, may say, nature does not now indulge the bards of Erin with earthquakes, to supply them with similes and poetic imagery!

Considering the paucity of Macpherson’s ideas and original images, it is truly astonishing how his poems ever acquired any

\* Shaw formed a true estimate of Macpherson’s poetry, when he wrote the following passage: “I remember when I travelled that country (the Highlands) three years ago, to have sat down on a hill, and the scene being favourable, in a poetic mood, I jingled together upon paper, with suitable invented Gaelic names, the epithets of blue-eyed, meek-eyed, mildly-looking, white-bosomed, dark-brown locks, noble, generous, valiant, tears, spears, darts, hearts, harts, quivers, bows, arrows, helmets, steel, streams, torrents, noble deeds, other times, bards, chiefs, storms, songs, &c., and produced a little poem which reads pretty smoothly; and if I had a mind to publish it, it would be no difficult matter to persuade some people that I had translated it from the Gaelic; for I might translate a stanza of it into Earse, shew it to the inquisitive, and say I had the rest by me, after which they would never inquire.”

SHAW’S INQUIRY, pp. 58, 59.

degree of popularity. He repeats the same image a thousand times, and presents it in every variety of attitude, and in every hue of the prism. The sun, the moon, the stars, meteors, clouds, vapours and mists, wind, light and darkness, grey stones and mossy towers, spears, helmets, and shields, are all confounded together in every page. His poetry resembles the kaleidoscope, an optical toy, which, on every turn presents a new combination of pieces of broken glass, exhibiting, through a lens, a curious variety of shapes and colours, but bearing no similitude to any thing in nature. The mind is at first dazzled and amused with this new species of poetical mosaic, but soon becomes satiated with its constant sameness and inutility. We read whole pages, nay whole poems, and when we have done cannot tell what we have been reading about. We seem to be wrapt in that eternal mist, which must have been the source of Macpherson's inspiration, the element in which he breathed, and of which his poetical world is composed.

As the same images and epithets are repeated with a frequency which few would readily credit who have not particularly attended to the subject, it will be necessary to illustrate our position by a few examples.

To begin with his favourite *mist* :

"Like the *mist* of Lano—his robe of *mist* flew on the wind—like grey and watery *mists*—stars, each looking faintly through her *mist*—his friends sit around the king on *mist*—they are rolled together like *mist*—Ossian sees the *mist* that shall receive his ghost—he beholds the *mist* that shall form his robe—I see them sitting on *mist*—*mist* settles on their four dark hills—ocean's *mist*—pillars of *mist*—columns of *mist*—day of *mist*—locks of *mist*—boars of *mist*—*folds* of *mist*—isle of *mist*—steeds like wreaths of *mist*.\*

\* Macpherson should be called *the poet of mist*, for no one has known its use better, or employed it more frequently than he. But lest we should not see and appreciate the tasteful

To *folds* he is almost as partial as to mist. Thus we read of the

“Moon swimming through its (the vapour’s) *folds—folded* cloud—*folded* in a storm—*folded* in his thoughts—*folded* in mist—*folds* of darkness—*folds* of battle—*folds* of war.”

Deeming darkness an ingredient in the sublime, he is never wearied with introducing it; hence he gives us:

“*Dark* streams—*dark-skirted* night—*dark-eyed* kings—*dark-red* cloud of Loda—*dark-rolling* years—*dark* course of streams—*dark* oak—*dark-robed* moon—*dark* wing—*dark-rolling* deep—*dark-brown* years—*dark-bosomed* ships—*dark-brown* side—thy thoughts are *dark*—the death that was *dark* in his soul—*dark* as the swelling wave of ocean—in the cave he placed me *dark*—*dark* rolls the river—who art thou in the *darkness*—the blast of *darkness*—the midst of *darkness*—no *darkness* travelled over his brows—*darkness* covered their beauty—thou hast left us in *darkness*—then the hero sits in *darkness*—I stood in the *darkness* of my strength—*darkness* gathers on his brows—the *darkness* of his face—he crept in *darkness*—he passed on in *darkness*—*darkness* shall roll on my side—spirits may descend in *darkness*—he fled to his ships in *darkness*—a *darkness* has met him—silence *darkened* every face—she shrunk *darkened* from Fingal—thou art *darkened* in thy youth—*darkened* moons—sadness *darkened* in his hall—the shield half-covered with clouds is like the *darkened* moon—nor *darkened* the king alone—wrath *darkened* in his soul—*darkening* years—*darkening* joy—the storms are *darkening*—the *darkening* chiefs—what *darkens* in Connal’s soul—the soul of Ossian *darkly* rose.”

To compensate for so much darkness, we have an equal quantity of light, brightening, glittering, and gleaming:

“The *light* of heaven was in the bosom of Cathmor.” Quære, is this a Celtic idea? Gladness rose a *light* on her face—the *light* of steel—a stream of *light*—her eyes were like

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manner in which he has employed it, he obligingly informs us, in a note to the eighth book of Temora. “Not all the strength of Homer,” he says, “could sustain with dignity the *minutiæ* of a single combat.” Therefore, he with more judgment than Homer, throws a *column of mist* over the combat of Fingal and Cathmor; and says, “it were well for some poets to have sometimes thrown *mist* over their single combats.” The idea is manifestly taken from the well-known story of the painting of the sacrifice of Iphigenia by Timanthes. The painter having exhausted his power of depicting grief on the attendants, judiciously threw a *column of mist*, we mean a veil, over the face of Agamemnon, and left the sorrows that overwhelmed the parent to be imagined by the spectator.

How did the old Celtic bard become acquainted with the painter of Sicily?



stars of *light*—the *light* of my soul shall arise—to-morrow I move in *light*—in *light* I met the foe—deeds are streams of *light*—the *light* of song—the streak of *light*—*light* of beauty—*light* of armour—the spirits of the dead *lightened* along his soul—he *lightened* forward in battle.”

“*Bright* from his parted west—*bright* in her locks—*bright*-tumbling stream—faces *bright* with joy—sword *bright*-streaming—the chief who travelled in *brightness*—their faces *brightened* round with joy—joy *brightens* the face of the host—like the flame of the sun when it is *bright*—gladness *brightened* in the hall—*brightened* with song—*brightened* looks—the *brightening* king—Lanul shall *brighten* at her streams.”

### Epithets and verbs compounded of *half* are innumerable :

“*Half*-unsheathed, (repeatedly)—*half*-kindled—*half*-enclosed—*half*-viewless—*half*-finished—*half*-formed—*half*-descended—*half*-fallen—*half*-extinguished meteor—*half*-extinguished fire—*half*-consumed—*half*-enraged—*half*-hid—*half*-bent—*half*-worn—*half*-formed of the shadowy smoke—*half*-enlightened—*half*-distinguished—*half*-heard—*half*-reclined—answer *half*-drowned in the storm—the king *half*-rose—he *half*-assumed the spear—morning with *half*-opened eyes—her eyes were *half*-closed in sleep—a *half*-formed sigh !”

### WHISTLE—

“He *whistled* as he went,” (verbatim from Dryden’s ‘*he whistled as he went for want of thought*’)—the withered fern *whistles*—my grey beard *whistled*—the blast *whistled* through every warrior’s hair—*whistling* tree—the winds *whistling*—he *whistling* strides along—he shall *whistling* return—*whistling* locks—*whistling* hair—feebly-*whistling* grass—grass which *whistles* in the wind—the dark moss *whistles*—*whistling* heath—*whistling* blast.”

### GATHERED—

“*Gathered* smiles—*gathered* rage—*gathered* mists.”

### ROLL is of frequent occurrence :

“The gleam of broken steel *rolled*,” (a false metaphor!)—the helmet *rolled*—thunder *rolls*—the foe is *rolled*—the storm is *rolled*—the voice of music is *rolled*—they are *rolled* together like mist—red *rolled* his eyes of rage—his soul was *rolled* into itself—he saw him *rolled* in a blast—waves of Erin *roll* in light—the spirit of Loda *rolled* into himself—she *rolled* her eye on the youth—the tear *rolled* down her cheek—they *rolled* back from his side—

they were *rolled* away—they *roll* their silent eyes—dark-*rolling* years—the blue stream is *rolling*—slow-*rolling* eyes of Comala—grey *rolled* the streams—*rolling* clouds—the shield fell *rolling* on the earth—his red eyes *rolled* on me in love—a cloud is *rolled* along thy soul—so *rolled* his sparkling eyes.”

The scriptural expression, “WINGS OF THE WIND,” often meets us :

“Spirits in a nightly cloud when they strive for the wintry *wings of wind*—the winds are beneath with their *wings*—the winds departed on their *wings*—be near with all your *wings*, ye winds—depart on thy *wings*, O wind—we *ride on the wings* of the roaring winds—summer gales, shaking their light *wings* on a lake—the meeting of ghosts in the dark *wing of winds*—Cormar travelled on *the wings of the wind*.”

DWELLER is also frequent ; the idea, as well as the expression, being taken, we presume, from the first verse of the lxxx Psalm : “thou that dwellest between the Cherubim :”

“Thou *dweller* between the harps—*dweller* between the shields—*dweller* of battle’s wing, (a curious dwelling-place!) blue-eyed *dwellers* of the tomb—*dweller* of eddying winds—*dweller* of thick mist—lovely *dweller* of the cave—trembling *dweller* of the rock—*dwellers* of the skirts of night—*dwellers* of rocks—young *dweller* of their souls—*dwellers* of Loda—dark-*dwelling* maid of Ardven—*dwellers* of Loda’s hall—*dweller* of my thoughts by night.”

#### “WANDER—

The boy, young *wanderer* of the field—Thou *wanderer* unseen, viz : the breeze of the valley—my son, a young *wanderer* in the field—the *wandering* of five dogs—the *wandering* of boughs—the *wandering* of herds—the *wandering* of tears—the *wandering* of blasts—deaths *wander* like shadows—the stars of night red-*wandering* in the west—a lock which *wandered* in the blast—*wandering* cloud—*wandering* blood—*wandering* locks—her eyes were *wandering* flames—fair *wanderer* of the clouds.”

ECHO is heard more frequently repeated in Ossian, than in her most favoured abodes at the Lakes of Killarney. We have

“*Echoing* woods—*echoing* groves—*echoing* hills—*echoing* vales—*echoing* halls—*echoing* walls—*echoing* rocks—*echoing* bay—*echoing* fray—*echoing* strife—*echoing* field—*echoing* shield—*echoing* tree—*echoing* steel—*echoing* strokes—*echoing* isles—*echoing* main—*echoing* Termoth

—echoing Ardven—echoing Cona—echoing Morven—echoing Selma—echoing Galmal—echoing Cromla—echoing Craca—echoing Caracha—echoing Etha—echoing Sora.”

We have also a superabundance of Moss :

“ Mossy rocks—mossy streams—mossy plains—mossy towers—mossy cave—mossy hill—mossy bank—mossy stone—mossy fountain—mossy brow—the moss of years—heads of moss.”

And of CLOUDS :

“ Slow as a gathering *cloud*—we see the *cloud* of death—like the *cloud* of a shower—thy form is like a watery *cloud*.”

And of FIRE :

“ Beam of *fire*—soul of *fire*—helmet of *fire*—pillar of *fire*—the kings on either side are like *fires*—a burning *fire*—a blue *fire*—the spreading of their *fire*—his rage was a *fire*—my eyes roll in *fire*—thy sword is a vapour half-kindled with *fire*—thine eyes a furnace of *fire*.”

The same images are repeated almost as frequently as the same epithets. The moon, for instance, is presented to us in every page, in every hue, in all the variety of her phases : dark-robed, bloody, aged, darkened, half-enlightened, dim and red on the western wave ; wan and cold in the east ; in autumn, full-orbed, eclipsed, and dim. Meteors also are as numerous, continually shooting and darting to and fro ; and when ever a maiden appears we may be sure the rainbow is not far distant.

“ Bright as a *rainbow* on streams came Lulan’s white-bosomed maid—Strinadona’s face was heaven’s *bow in showers*—Who fell on Carun’s banks?—He was blooming as the *bow of the shower*—Vinvla came in her beauty, like the *showery bow*—I see thee fair moving on the plain, bright as the *bow of heaven*—Ryno was like the *bow of the shower*, seen far distant on the stream—The daughters of Morven came forth like the *bow of the shower*.”



Not contented with telling us once that “a star dim twinkled through his form,” he informs us again that—

“A red star with twinkling beam *looked* through his floating hair”—and again, that “a red star *looked* through the plumes of his helmet”—once more he says, “thy form is like a watery cloud, when we see the *stars* behind it with their weeping eyes.”

Even his metaphysical ideas are obtruded upon us again and again :

“Pleasant is the *joy of grief*. It is like the shower of spring, when it softens the branch of the oak, and the young leaf lifts its green head.”—CARRICKTHURA. “The *joy of grief* belongs to Ossian amidst his dark brown years.”—TEMORA, book vii. Fingal commands Ossian to “raise to *joy his grief*,” viz: the king of Lochlin’s.—FINGAL, book v. The son of Semo “saw Fingal victorious, and mixed his *joy with grief*.”—ID. The blue-eyed son of Semo said to Carril, “send thou the night away in song; and give the *joy of grief*.”—FINGAL, book i.

“The joy of grief,” says Laing, “is an abstract and refined expression of the pleasure with which we dwell on fictitious distress; an idea infinitely too complex for a barbarian, but a subject much canvassed at the time both by Burke and Smith. The expression is more poetical than just; the satisfaction arising from fictitious woe may amount to pleasure, but can never constitute positive joy. But ‘the joy of grief’ is an expression of curious felicity, which it is impossible to translate with the same energy into another language.” Accordingly the translator into Gaelic has failed in rendering this expression, *Tha solas ann tuireadh*. “*Solas*,” says Laing, “is literally *solatium*, solace; *tuireadh*, a request, a dirge, sorrow, is derived from *tuirse*, tired;\* but the question would appear an insult to the most credulous understanding, whether *Tha solas ann tuireadh* was an expression used by Ossian in the third century, or by Macpherson, unable to give an adequate expression of the joy of grief.”

\* Lloyd’s Preface, translated in Nicholson’s Irish Hist. Lib.

## SECTION V.

*On the Language of Ossian.*

LANGUAGE, like every thing human, is fluctuating and liable to constant change. Even where it is preserved by written rules, it is not exempt from mutations and corruptions. In the course of ages it suffers so much alteration as to be scarcely recognizable as the same language. Its fate is similar to that of the ship that is constantly repaired by new timbers, or the metaphysician's stocking, which, by frequent wearing and darning, had its personal identity rendered questionable.

Ut silvæ foliis pronos mutantur in annos,  
Prima cadunt; ita verborum interit ætas,  
Et juvenum ritu florent modo nata, vigentque.

HOR.

As when the forest, with the bending year,  
First sheds the leaves which earliest appear,  
So an old age of words maturely dies,  
Others, new born, in youth and vigour rise.

FRANCIS.

The history of all languages bears evidence to the truth of these observations of the Roman poet. It was strikingly exemplified in his native tongue, nor is it less so in our own.\* How few can at present

\* Niebhur, in his *Travels in Arabia*, observes that the "Arabian language, one of the most ancient and general in the world, has had the fate of other living languages which have been spoken through many ages, and by the inhabitants of different provinces and countries remote from one another. It has gradually undergone such an alteration, that the Arabic spoken and written by Mahomet, may now be regarded as a dead language."

understand the writings of Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld, or the “Chronykle” of Wintown, Chaucer, or the whole even of so late a writer as Spenser, without the help of a glossary? But the advocates of the authenticity of Ossian, maintain that his language was exempt from the usual vicissitudes; that the insulated situation of the kingdom of Morven prevented the introduction of foreign terms; and that it has flowed down to us through the channel of oral tradition, uncontaminated and pure as when it flowed from the lips of the Caledonian bard. The victories of the Highland Scots over the Roman legions, the subsequent introduction of Christianity, the visits of the Danes and Norwegians, their occasional commercial intercourse with the Lowlanders, and their subjection to the crowns of Scotland and of England, never corrupted the purity of their immaculate tongue! The people, indeed, degenerated into barbarism, but the language remained uncorrupt, to attest to these degenerate times, the genius and refinement of the days of old! Widely different has been the fate of the same language in Ireland, where it was written according to grammatical rules, and where it had legislators, philosophers, and poets, who might be considered as its guardians against innovation and corruption. In defiance of just laws and sage maxims, and the more popular influence of song, it has undergone such revolutions as would prevent the best Irish scholars from understanding any compositions of the grandson of Comhal, were any such really extant. They would be to him as the *annosa volumina vatium*, to the contemporaries of Horace; or, as the fragments yet remaining of the Brehon laws to the most erudite Irish antiquary. But the Gaelic version of Ossian presented to the public by Sir John Sinclair, is in the language spoken at the present day, and accompanied with no difficulty which every ordinary Irish or Erse scholar cannot easily overcome. Of course, it is justly regarded as the fabrication of Macpherson and



his coadjutors. We have already noticed General Vallancey's detection of imposition in the few lines of the pretended original which Macpherson had the indiscreet temerity to publish. O'Flanagan, secretary to the Gaelic Society of Dublin, speaks of it as "the detected forgery of a modern corrupt dialect."\* That excellent Irish scholar, Mr. O'Reilly, author of the "*Chronological Account of nearly four hundred Irish Writers*," speaking of Cormac, monarch of Ireland, A. D. 250, some of whose compositions are said to be still preserved, justly observes, (p. xxiii,) "if the genuine Poems of Oisín were extant, their language would be the same as that of Cormac's works, which are nearly unintelligible to the generality of Irish readers, and completely so to the vulgar. The language of those poems, which the Highland Society have given to the world, as the originals of Oisín, is the living language of the Highlanders of the present day, and *if properly spelled* and read by an Irish scholar, would be intelligible to the most illiterate peasant in Ireland." The learned Doctor O'Connor, than who, no one was ever more competent to give an opinion on this subject, for no one was ever more profoundly versed in Irish literature, expresses himself in a similar manner. "*Lingua enim Hibernica, qua Incolæ Hiberniæ et Albanæ nunc vulgo utuntur, in pluribus diversa est ab antiqua; et cum id in Codicibus scriptis pateat, quis, nisi partium studiis abreptus, non percipit, diversitatem longe majorem necessario oriri debere in lingua non scripta.*" He notices the changes which have taken place in the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages; and observes that the Greek liturgies of Basil and Chrysostom, though publicly read even now in the Greek churches, are unintelligible by the common people. That the Latin tongue has experienced as great a change, is evident from the verses of the Salii,

\* Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin, pp. 25, 26.

the laws of the xii tables, and the inscription on the *columna rostrata* of Duillius, sculptured only 150 years before Cicero.

Polybius assures us that the most learned of his contemporaries could with difficulty understand the articles of the treaty made with the Carthaginians after the expulsion of the kings. Great changes took place in the Roman language, from intrinsic causes, before the Goths subjugated Italy. As long as languages are destitute of learned men to give them stability, so long must they fluctuate and be liable to be vitiated by new inflexions, by idioms and solecisms, ignoble and plebeian. Every nation borrows the peculiar idiom of the foreigners and neighbours with whom it carries on commerce; what is good is easily changed for the worse, and the greater the corruption, the more strongly does it adhere to the speech of the vulgar. Now if the more polished tongues undergo such mutations, much more, must we conclude, will those which are barbarous experience similar vicissitudes. In the lapse of ages, and especially since the invasion of the English, the native language of the Irish, not only of the common people, but of the nobles and gentry, has been greatly contaminated.\*

Doctor O'Connor says, there is in Stowe Library an unedited rhythmical poem, ascribed to Oliol-Olam, who flourished in the third century. Whether it was really the production of Oliol-Olam or not is questionable; its antiquity, however, cannot be doubted, "*cum ex Codice vetusto Congabhala descriptum fuerit, qui a monasterio Dungallense, ante iv. Magistrorum tempora, summa cum veneratione servabatur.*" In the margin of this poem, the Doctor's grandfather had, with his own hand, written "*ni maith thuigim an tsean duan so.*" "I do not

\* The curious reader may see this subject illustrated at greater length in the original work of Doctor O'Connor.

well understand this ancient poem." It is entitled *Cath Mucruimha*. Keating, O'Flaherty, and others, notice it, but in such a manner as evinces them to have laboured under the same difficulty as the venerable O'Connor.\* Colgan, speaking of the poems of Dallanus, says, they are written in the ancient style, and that, consequently, they were in a great degree unintelligible in after times, even to many who were skilled in the old idiom of their country. "*A multis alioquin in veteri patrio idiomate versatis, nequeunt penetrari.*"† The same author notices an Irish manuscript on parchment, in the Irish library, at Louvain, in which Saint Patrick and Coilte are introduced conversing, and pronounces it to be a forgery from the style independently of the anachronism, for Coilte lived in the reign of Cormac, A. D. 250. *Est commentitium, et posterioris ævi ut ex ipso stylo satis liquet.* He passes the same judgment on another work, in which Saint Patrick and Oisín are interlocutors.‡

But we need not have recourse to reasoning nor to learned authorities, since Macpherson himself and his friends, by a just fatality ever attendant on imposture, sufficiently confute their own hypothesis by their own confessions. The former, in several of his notes, pretends that he has been able to distinguish a spurious from a genuine production of Ossian, by the language alone. Thus, in the third note of Cath-Loda, he states, that the names of certain warriors

"Are mentioned as attending Comhal in his last battle against the tribe of Morni, in a poem which is still preserved. It is not the work of Ossian; the phraseology betrays it to be

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\* O'Flaherty says, "I do not suppose the poem to be genuine, because, in the benedictions which he gives Eugenius living and dead, he uses a style and expression totally unknown to pagan ages."—OGY. vol. ii. p. 228.

† O'Connor's Prolegomena, p. lxxiv.

‡ Vide Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores.—EP. NUN. p. lxi.



*a modern composition.* It is something like those trivial compositions which the Irish bards forged, under the name of Ossian, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries."

Again, in the first note to the third duan of the same poem, he says,

"The interpolations (of the bards) are so easily distinguished from the genuine remains of Ossian, that it took me very little time to mark them out, and totally to reject them. If the modern Scotch and Irish bards have shewn any judgment, it is in ascribing their own compositions to names of antiquity, for by that means, they themselves have escaped that contempt, which the authors of such futile performances must necessarily have met with, from people of true taste."

Macpherson was privileged to write this, for no one could appreciate the judgment of the modern bards more highly than he; none has been so successful a rival of their dishonesty. He deserves to reign sole monarch in the dominion of literary imposture. In the second note to Carrick-Thura, he speaks of a poem of Ossian on the strife of Crona, which "it was impossible for him to procure *with any degree* of purity." Why then did he not give it to the world in its impurity, to prove that he was not uttering a falsehood, and leave it to the purgation of some Celtic Aristarchus? Speaking of the poem "*Fion gal na buai*," in a note to the 7th book of Temora, he says, that *from the phraseology it appears to be ancient*; and in a note to the 8th book, "*from the language* (of some Hibernian poems in his hands) and allusions to the times in which they were writ, I should fix the date of their composition to the fifteenth or sixteenth century."

It is evident then, from the confessions of the great fabricator himself, that the Gaelic language has suffered such changes and corruptions as indicate a marked difference between its ancient and modern compositions; consequently the hypothesis that Ossian's Poems have been handed down in an intelligible form, by oral tradition, is

altogether destitute of foundation. Even Graham, one of the most desperate supporters of their authenticity, is constrained to admit, that, "in the lapse of ages, *a few* terms should become obsolete, and that others of more recent origin should be introduced in their stead." He might have added, that his compatriot, Kennedy, the pedagogue, was guilty of great indiscretion, in giving the Earse line, "*Ruidh fuaimneach arm mar Spiorad Lodda*," as the original of Macpherson's line, "he rushed in the sound of his arms, as the spirit of Lodda."\* But he was ignorant that Macpherson had given *Cruth Loduin*," as the more genuine original, and thus unwarily betrayed the lying inventions of his school.

Some of the verses that have been published as those of Ossian, by Scotch editors, are, in the judgment of Doctor O'Connor, widely different both in idiom and orthography, from those of our genuine Irish bards. The idiom of Homer, he observes, does not differ more widely from that of the modern Greeks, than the Irish language, as exhibited in certain verses of Molingus and Adamnanus preserved in the Annals of Tigernach, differs from those Scotch compositions, which are in style more corrupt than our common vernacular Irish, and both in sound and appearance are equally offensive to the ears and the eyes of the learned.† The Doctor here alludes particularly to a collection of Erse poems, in possession of the Highland Society,‡ containing more than 11,000 verses. In these poems the orthography seems to be adapted to the vulgar pronunciation, and the letters *k, w, x, y, z*, which are never used in genuine Irish compositions, every where meet the eye.

As instances of the recent coinage of words in the modern Gaelic Ossian, he quotes the following: *Houdir*, author; *nyceith*, night;

\* Laing's Preface.

† EP. NUN. cxxi.

‡ See the Report, p. 92.

*spiorad*, spirit ; *corp* (corpus,) body ; *beist*, beast ; *ros*, rose ; *halla*, hall ; *roda*, road ; *arm*, arms ; *anam* (anima,) soul ; *muinaidh* (montes,) mountains ; *ceir* (cera,) wax ; *libhearn* (liburna,) navis ; *stoirm*, storm !!!

The following words and phrases from Macpherson, have been noticed by Laing, as of modern introduction to the Gaelic :

*Earradh*, literally the English array from the Teutonic, *raia*, *rada*, *ordo*, hence raiment, array.

As *diasul*, or *greine*, would signify Sunday, he was obliged to adopt the English idiom in translating *the day of the sun*,\* S'grian *orradh* na beinn, the sun gilding the hills.

*Anam*, the soul, from *anima* ; *deur*, a tear, derived by Lloyd from the Teutonic ; *am-measg*, amidst, expressions which no credulity, however weak, can impute to Ossian, and which, instead of the second (third) century, demonstrate a recent translation into a mixed language of the eighteenth.

The warrior's grave is translated *palin*, a shroud, from the Latin *pallium*, and the English *pall*.

*Faisich*, a desert, is a correlative term, suggested by its contrast with peopled or cultivated fields ; but as all places were equally desert to a tribe of hunters, who subsisted in the desert, there was no relative to suggest either the idea or the name. The same observation is applicable to autumn's dark storms. Among hunters who have neither harvests nor fruits, "*autumni perinde nomen et bona ignorantur*."

The English name and idiom of *steel* for armour are assigned by Macpherson, from his own Highlander, "steel speaks on steel" to the third century, when steel was seldom or never used in armour by the Romans themselves.—The German *stahel*, the Saxon and Scandinavian *stall*, is repeated by name. *Chuinic is e na stalin chruai*. "She saw him in his hard steel."

Macpherson, it seems, was greatly puzzled to find an adequate expression for *boss*. To transcribe itself would have been too gross, and therefore he chose "the Saxon and German *cup*. *Seached COP-PAIN a b' h'air an sciath*, seven bosses rose on the shield :"

\* The *day of the sun* is an imitation from Ezekiel, i. 28 : "The appearance of the bow that is in the cloud, in the day of rain."



"If a circumstance can render the detection more complete, the hundred cups of the Irish ballad of Erragon, are converted in the battle of Lora, into ten shells (*sliogh*) studded with gems, that gladdened once the kings of the world. But in Cathmor's marvellous shield (an obvious imitation of the shield of Achilles,) *copan* a cup, so fastidiously rejected as unknown to Ossian in its proper signification, is applied metaphorically to the seven bosses tipt with seven stars of night, that spoke like a peal of bells, each in a separate voice or vowel to seven kings."

"*Riding*, applied in English to ships, is a familiar idiom ; and the dark riders of ocean is an easy metaphor, not to be translated with impunity into a different language. *Marchaidh a chuain mhoir*, the horseman of the great sea, is a harsh and obvious translation of the rider of ocean, equally ridiculous with *eques maris*, or *Cavalier de la mer*, were it translated into French."—LAING'S DISSERTATION.

Mr. Laing and others, besides Doctor O'Connor, thought they could discover in these and similar terms, ample and satisfactory proofs of modern forgery. Doctor Graham meets the objection, and in that part of his Essay which we deem the most valuable, endeavours, not without success, to prove that "the Gauls who invaded Italy, from the period of Tarquinius to the sacking of Rome, were really of Celtic stock, and, therefore, it might be expected that their language would influence that of the Romans in a very material degree ; hence, it follows, that no legitimate argument against the authenticity of Ossian can be derived from the similarity that may be traced between certain Latin and Gaelic terms." This is certainly plausible. Doctor O'Connor was aware of the objection, and states the admission of Quintilian, that the Latins borrowed many words from the Gauls, as *Rheda* and *Petoritum*. But it by no means follows, that such words as have been quoted above, are of Celtic origin, since in the really ancient Celtic poems, far different terms are used to express the same things, and they were never admitted into the Irish vernacular tongue, except in liturgies, or after the English invasion. The word Lochlan, which is a hundred times

employed by Macpherson, to signify the Danes is found in no poem earlier than the tenth century. The most ancient MS. poem extant, ascribed to Ossian, is in the Bodleian library. It is entitled in the catalogue, *Gigantomachia*, and was written in the fourteenth century. Price, the librarian, told Doctor O'Connor, that he shewed it to Macpherson, who, for once, had the honesty to confess, that by reason of its contractions, it was to him totally unintelligible and illegible!\* So true it is, that not only no genuine poems of Ossian exist, but even those of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries ascribed to him, still remain without a faithful editor or transcriber. Well, therefore, may we join with Hume, in his letter to Gibbon, expressing wonder, "that any man of common sense could have imagined it possible, that above twenty thousand verses, along with numberless historic facts, could have been preserved by oral tradition, during fifty generations, by the rudest, perhaps, of all the European nations, the most necessitous, the most turbulent and unsettled. [*Loquitur de Scotiæ Albanicæ monticolis et Insulanis.*] Where a supposition is so contrary to common sense, any positive evidence of it ought never to be regarded."† But the wonder is still farther increased, when we consider, that of all compositions in existence, none are so difficult to remember as Macpherson's Ossian, because it has no regularly consecutive series of ideas, like the *Iliad*, or *Æneid*, or Tasso's *Jerusalem*. It is a heterogeneous and chaotic mass of bombastic epithets, and poetic scraps; the reflection, not of "nature's calm image," but of an artificial landscape; not from a smooth, but an agitated surface, where

"Glimmering fragments of a broken sun,  
Banks, trees, and skies in wild disorder run."

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\* *Rerum. Hib. Scriptores*, vol. i. Ep. Nun. pp. ci. cxxiii.

† *Gibbon's Miscellaneous Works*, vol. i. p. 149, London, 1796.

We have read of a lady who could repeat a considerable part of Pope's Homer, and knew a scholar who committed to memory the Agamemnon of Æschylus ; but does any one exist who can repeat a single page of Macpherson's Ossian ?

Those who maintain that Ossian's Poems have been preserved by oral tradition, tell wonderful stories of the strength and capacity of Highland memories. Sir John Sinclair informs us, that "Captain John Mac-Donald declared, that when he was about twelve or fifteen years of age, he could repeat from one hundred to two hundred Gaelic poems of different lengths; that he learned them from an old man about eighty years of age, who sung them for years to his father when he went to bed at night, and in the spring and winter before he rose in the morning." Other instances are adduced of persons who "could repeat for hours on each of three successive days, many thousand lines of ancient poetry, and, as appeared to Doctor Stewart, with perfect correctness."

That the Highlanders have retentive memories, and can repeat long poems and tales, is not disputed. The question is, has any one of them ever repeated a single poem which was the true original Gaelic, from which Macpherson translated any part of his Ossian ? And now that they actually do exist in Gaelic, into which we have a perfect persuasion that they have been translated from the English, can any Highlander repeat them ? We believe not.—Not because modern Highlanders have worse memories than their forefathers, but because the modern Gaelic, into which the poems have been rendered, is of a totally different structure from that of the ancient bards, and wants that peculiar rhythmical cadence, which, like our own English rhymes, presented such facilities to the memory.

Had Macpherson really possessed any genuine Gaelic MSS., and understood them, he would not have left us under any doubt of their



existence, but given us their description and history. He would have told us where and when they were discovered, in what measure the poems were composed, and in what dialect, whether in the *Bearla Feine*, the dialect of the learned, or of the *Bearla rustach*, the dialect of the vulgar. Let us see how a writer who has such a MS. proceeds. He tells distinctly all he knows concerning it, or at least all that is necessary to be known; where found, and where to be seen; on what substance, and in what form written; the language, the character, the number of pages, whether entire or mutilated.

Thus Doctor O'Connor speaks of the Codex Stowensis, No. I. :

"Codex membranaceus est, in IVto; lingua et characteribus Hibernicis. Constat foliis 42, quorum quæque pagina duobus columnis divisa est. Desunt folia nonnulla in initio et in fine, unde difficile est dictu quo ævo exaratus fuerit. \* \* \* \* \* Characteres sunt rotundi, nitidi, elegantes. Literarum et atramenti talis est uniformitas, et pulchritudo, ut vix cedat arti typographicæ, et atramentum æternitati sacrum videatur. Litera *u* nullibi scribitur forma angulari *v*, sive consonans, sive vocalis, neque unquam duplicatur ut *w*. Litera *i* nullo puncto, nulla aspiratione supra notata designatur. Nullibi extat litera *j* consonans, vel *y*, vel *æ* diphthongus; nec quævis est punctuatio præter punctum simplex. Numeri sunt ubique Romani."

He then proceeds to analyze the contents; in which task we deem it unnecessary to follow him. We shall only repeat how he describes the external form of a poem in this MS. :

"Fol. 7. p. 2. col. 1. a poem commences, *Torinis, Inis an tuir, cathair Conain*, (Torinis, insula turris, arx Conani.) It consists of forty-eight lines, each of which, by a rhythmical method peculiar to the Irish, is resolvable into two lines or one distich, the rhythm in the middle of the line corresponding and harmonizing with the last syllable in the end."

He afterwards gives us a history of the rhythmic art among the Irish, commencing page lxvi. of the second of his Prolegomena. As this topic is so intimately connected with the subject of this Essay,

it will not be deemed irrelevant, we trust, to enrich it with some extracts translated and abridged from his learned work.

He informs us that O'Flaherty and Harris affirm that Fortchern, the son of Deaga, and Nediús, the son of Adneus, two celebrated poets in the reign of Concovar, king of Ulster, flourished at Eamania thirty-four years A. C.; that Fortchern wrote various precepts of poesy, and various kinds of verse; and that his book is entitled *Uraiceacht na n eacgios*, (Precepts of the Poets,) that it contained a hundred varieties of versification; that Kennfeola, the son of Olioll, interpolated it many ages after, viz. A. D. 628. They add that Fortchern, Nediús, and Aitherneus, poet of Concovar, were among the poets who established the legal enactments, called *Breatha nimhe*, or celestial judgments.

Doctor O'Connor does not place implicit faith in these statements, but maintains it to be a well established fact, that the poetic art was cultivated in Ireland from a very remote period, as is plain from the declaration of Adamnanus, in the 7th century, in the first book of his Life of Columbanus, c. 42, where he has some notices of Cronan, a poet, who, according to the custom of his art, *ex more suæ artis*, sang his songs in a modulated manner, *modulabiter*. He affirms this, not from the authority of one passage in Adamnanus, or from verses yet extant of Columbanus, but from many inedited remains of the bards preserved by Tigernach and other ancient historians.

Some have affirmed that the rhythmic or rhyming art was unknown before the eleventh century, and that, consequently, the fragments alluded to must have been subsequent to that age. They egregiously err, and Muratorius (*della poesia Italiana*,) meant to confine his observations on this subject to the modern tongues, since he repeatedly testifies that rhyme was used by the ancients. That it was known in Ireland before the introduction of Christianity, is evident

from the practice of Cronan, whom the whole context of Adamnanus declares to have been a heathen. That this art passed from the Irish to the Anglo-Saxons, is demonstrated by Adhelm, who was himself educated by Maildolph, an Irishman, from whom he learned the Latin tongue. He was the first of the Anglo-Saxons who wrote Latin, in which language he composed a rhyming poem, *De Virginitate*, as Turner remarks, while he iniquitously (*inique*) conceals where he received his education.

Doctor O'Connor notices several other authors who wrote in rhyme, and makes particular mention of a poem on the Trinity, composed by Columbanus, sent to Saint Gregory at Rome, and published in the *Triad*, p. 473. In this poem the peculiar Irish rhythmical structure is conspicuous, namely, the syllable in the middle of the line, rhymes with the syllable at the end; an equal space of time being preserved between the first and second division; whence it is apparent, that though written in Latin, it is constructed on an Hibernian model.

Turner says, he was led to examine Adhelm, by observing that three lines, which Simeon, of Durham, quotes from him, *rhyme in the middle*. "Here then is an example of rhyme in an author who lived before the year 700, and he was an Anglo-Saxon. Whence did he derive it? Not from the Arabs: they had not yet reached Europe. I would rather refer it to the popular songs in his own language, or in the language of his neighbours." He must have known, and he ought to have informed his readers, that Adhelm borrowed it from the Irish, among whom he was educated.

The Hibernian words *rann*, *rimh*, *riomh*, *rinn*, have no other signification than *rhyme*. Columbanus, as Turner admits, had written verses of the same kind as those which Adhelm composed in rhyme, and, consequently, also admits that it was from Columbanus, Adhelm learned or adopted the practice. Columbanus himself learned it from



the Irish bards, who, when instructed in the Christian religion, and a knowledge of the Latin tongue, deemed it a duty of sacred obligation to deliver the precepts of the new faith in the same style as they had been accustomed to employ in delivering the precepts of the Druids, and celebrating the heroic deeds of their countrymen. Turner subjoins, that “Albinus quotes a rhymed poem of Sedulius, an Irishman, who lived in the middle of the fifth century;” and Bede says, that Adhelm wrote verses in imitation (*ad exemplum*) of Sedulius. Turner affirms, and Usher demonstrates, that this Sedulius was an Irishman. Bayle and Labbe hold a different opinion, but it is supported by no authority, while that of Usher is confirmed by the testimony of Fabricius, Possevinus, Trithemius, Sixtus Senensis, Bellarmine, and Cave. But independently of such testimonies, the name of Sedulius alone, which is exclusively Hibernian, is sufficient authority. There were eight men of the name of Sedulius, all of them conspicuous for their piety and learning, as is attested by the Annals of Innisfail, of the Four Masters, and Tigernach.

No better specimen of the rhyming form of poetry, peculiar to Ireland, can be adduced, than the following lines from a hymn of Sedulius :

“A solis ortus cardine—ad usque terræ litem,  
Christum canamus principem—natum Maria virgine.”

Nothing of the kind extant is more ancient than this. The Latin missionaries who crowded to Ireland borrowed the practice, and thence it became general.

That the ancient Irish had fixed rules of poetry, is incontestible. They sang their lays to the sound of the harp, in presence of their chiefs. Buchanan and Camden both agree, that many of the

ancient customs were preserved even till their times, and that until the reign of James the First, little change had taken place except in religion. And here we do not contend for an extravagant antiquity, of which no vestiges remain. The manuscripts yet extant, the form of the letters, the antiquity of the style, the genius of the Hibernian tongue, the infinite variety of events which all mutually accord, the ancient names of places, with the chronological adjuncts of persons and things, leave no room for doubt as to their historic truth.

Some affirm from the *Uraiceacht* of Fortchern, that there were anciently one hundred varieties of verse among the Hibernian bards. But in all the more ancient specimens which have reached our times, there is great simplicity and uniformity. The rhythm consists in an equal distance of intervals, and similar terminations, each line being divisible into two, that it may be more easily accommodated to the voice and the music of the bards: it is not formed by the nice collocation of long and short syllables, but by a certain harmonic rhythm, adjusted to the voice of song by the position of words which touch the heart and assist the memory. In every ancient Irish verse a pause in the very middle of it may be discerned, from which the succeeding clause of the same verse commences, and making harmony with the preceding, is completed in the same space of time, and with a similar termination. Hence, each verse consists of two times, terminating with a like *cantilena*, and making two verses as to sound.

The quantity of a syllable was in no manner affected either by the number or kind of consonants preceding a vowel, provided the same time were occupied, and the final sound observed from pause to pause: and though neither the same number of syllables occurred, nor the same sound were observed in the finals, the art itself, and the skill of the musician in lengthening or shortening the time, claimed the privilege of producing what was short, and abbreviating what

was long. The last syllable of each pause was always long ; for though the syllable were short, it was made long by dwelling on it a double space of time. These observations, however, do not apply to poetry, nor to that elegant and harmonious arrangement of its words and syllables, which the strict rules of the art require, but to poetry combined with music.

No example exhibits the peculiar structure of poetry adapted to music by the Irish bards, and the mode in which the missionaries of the sixth century imitated them in Latin verses, better than a hymn in praise of Brigid, written by *Ultanus Ardbraconensis*, who died in 655. Usher speaks of this hymn in *Primordiis*, p. 963, and it was published by Colgan, in *Triade*, p. 542.

It commences thus :

“Christus in nostra insula—quæ vocatur Hibernia,  
Ostensus est hominibus—maximis mirabilibus, &c.”

Giraldus Cambrensis testifies the superior skill of the Irish harpers, in the following eloquent terms :

“In musicis instrumentis *præ omni natione* quam vidimus incomparabiliter est instructa. (Hibernia.) Non enim in his, sicut in Britannicis quibus assueti sumus, instrumentis, tarda et morata est modulatio, verum velox, et præceps, suavis tamen, et jucunda sonoribus. Mirum quod in tanta, tam præcipiti digitorum rapacitate, musica servatur proportio.”

Numerous testimonies of a similar kind might be adduced, but we deem it superfluous to pursue the subject farther in this place. Enough has been said, we should hope, to convince every one who has consulted but a single page of Macpherson's Gaelic Ossian, that it has no similitude to the style and structure of ancient Irish poetry. It is altogether a work of modern fabrication, translated into modern



Gaelic from the English Ossian, and interlarded with fragments of the Irish Fenian Tales, from which Macpherson first took the idea of constructing his pastoral epics. The Highland Society, in the 137th page of their report, justly observed that the publication of the entire original

“Will afford an opportunity to those who question its authenticity, to examine narrowly the intrinsic evidence arising from the nature and construction of the language. This will be of the first importance in the dispute. The committee does not recollect any instance of a fabrication in a foreign language, or in a language supposed to be that of an ancient period, where, upon an accurate examination, internal proofs of the forgery have not been discovered in the very language alone in which the forgery was attempted to be conveyed.”

It was magnanimous in the committee to write thus. The original has been weighed in their own balance, and found wanting. The very first lines which Macpherson published, as a specimen of the ancient Ossian, betrayed the cheat, and exposed his ignorance of the ancient Gaelic language and versification ; and we feel strongly convinced that every succeeding investigation will tend only still farther to expose his impositions.

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## SECTION VI.

*On the probable Era and Origin of the Poems attributed to Ossian.*

THAT Oisín, the son of Fin Mac-Cumhal, had acquired great reputation as a poet among his countrymen, may be justly concluded from the long and constant traditions of posterity. Fin was himself a poet, and, like the great Achilles, delighted in stringing the harp to the glorious deeds of heroes and of kings. But that any of the poems actually composed or sung either by him or Oisín, have been

handed down to our times, few will have the hardihood to affirm. In fact, the language in which they wrote or spoke, as we have before had occasion to remark, would not be intelligible at the present time.

Fin, from his warlike achievements, was regarded as the prince of heroes, and in the romantic imaginations of his countrymen, he became at last invested with supernatural strength. Hence, many of the rude monuments of stone, found in different districts of Ireland, the *rocky circle*, the *kist-vaens*, and the huge *trilithon*, are ascribed by the vulgar, to the architectural power of Fin and his associates. Hence also his exploits became the frequent subject of song. He was to Ireland, as Arthur and the knights of the round table to England, the theme of many a legend, and the hero of many a tale.

Walker, in his History of the Irish bards, (p. 110,) says that “several of the poems attributed to Oisin are the production of bards of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as may be easily proved from some terms of language unknown to the Irish in earlier times.” This may also be inferred from the change which took place in the application of poetry to subjects of fiction. At first it was the only vehicle of true history, and it was employed down to a very late period as the most eligible mode of recording real events. The *Cronykil* of Wyntown, and *The Bruce* of Barbour, though written in verse, are appealed to by Dalrymple and other historians, as to veracious authority. To such use was early Irish poetry devoted, and though it does not seem necessary to suppose that it excluded all fiction, a marked distinction must have been preserved between poems of real history, and those of imagination. Our native Irish historians of more modern times, such as Keating and O’Flaherty, frequently refer to ancient poems for proof or illustration, and nothing can exceed the bald and unpoetical character of many of the passages which

they quote. They differ as far from Macpherson's high-sounding bombast, as a naked savage from a powdered and perfumed courtier. In fact, they are mere prose, except in the metrical disposition of the words :

Nisi quod pede certo  
Differt sermoni, sermo merus.

HOR.

But as the learned editor of the "Reliques of Ancient Poetry" has observed, "after letters began to prevail, and history assumed a more stable form, by being committed to plain, simple prose, the songs of the scalds or bards began to be more amusing than useful. And in proportion as it became their business chiefly to entertain and delight, they gave more and more into embellishment, and set off their recitals with such marvellous fictions, as were calculated to captivate gross and ignorant minds." "This," says Walker, "was precisely the case in Ireland. Verse ceased to be used in our historical writings, about the twelfth or thirteenth century, and consequently it was no longer subservient to truth."

The Fenian poems with which Macpherson was well acquainted, were, as their name implies, confined to the exploits of Fionn and his warriors: Oisín, Fergus, Dermot Dun, Caoilte, Goll Mac-Mórne, the bald and senseless Conan, the blue-eyed Roineá, generous Gavar, mild Colla of curled locks, and others whose names and characters may be seen in *Jaol n' se fēara ðeaz*, the poem of the Sixteen Men. Fionn is, of course, the principal hero, but not always, for Oílleán sometimes appears to be a chief of even superior prowess. An opinion has been entertained, that these poems have some resemblance to the *rhapsodies* of Homer, and that they might all be thrown together, so as to form one great epic; but this opinion does not seem well founded, as each poem is generally complete in itself.



Notwithstanding, we have the same personages in most of them, and their characters are well discriminated, and consistently preserved: that of Conan, for instance, who is a species of Thersites; or something between Thersites and Sir John Falstaff, boastful, presumptuous, cowardly, yet capable of sometimes “screwing up his courage to the sticking place,” altogether a character of much originality.\*

In these tales the machinery of enchantment is frequently employed, and hence some of them are supposed by Walker to be of eastern origin, and introduced by missionaries from the monastic institutions of Italy, when they came to regulate the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland. He is also of opinion, that many Moorish and Arabian tales might have found their way hither during the commercial intercourse that subsisted between Spain and Galway. He observes that there is a marked resemblance between the Irish tale of *Conloch*, and the story of *Rustam*, as related by the Persian poet, Ferdusi. He also ascribes the Irish poem of *Moir a Borb* to an Eastern origin, and thinks its heroine like the Armida of Tasso. The story of the ring, related by Trissino, in his *Italia Liberata*, is so strikingly similar to that in the Irish poem of the Chase, that “both, it may be presumed, were raised upon the same foundation. In both we discover the colouring of magic with which the Saracens of the middle ages, then adepts in chemistry, tinctured all their fables.”

But a belief in the arts of enchantment had been introduced to Ireland long prior to the age of the Saracens. Had Walker recol-

\* James Hardiman, Esq. M. R. I. A., the learned and ingenious author of the History of Galway, has in his possession a MS. copy of many of the Fenian poems, transcribed, in the Irish language, from the dictation of a Connaught peasant, and rendered verbatim into English. For the use of this collection, the author embraces the present occasion of making his grateful acknowledgments to its liberal and patriotic owner.

lected the 10th chapter of Keating's history, which records the conquest of Ireland, by the Tuatha-De-Danans, he would have stated that the magic art was well known and successfully practised by those adventurers. It was said that they could infuse demons into the bodies of the slain, and send them forth to fight their battles over again; as the Syrians, with whom they contended in Greece, found to their cost, till they prevented this species of resurrection by transfixing them with stakes of the mountain ash! When the Tuatha-De-Danans came to Ireland, they brought with them four articles deemed precious, on account, we suppose, of some enchanted virtue, a brazen caldron; the spear of Looee Longhand, (*Lughaidh Lamfhada*;) "a sword alone for death decreed;" and the famous *Liagh fail*, or stone of destiny. Some of them were so skilled in necromancy, that they obtained the name of De-Dannan, or Gods of Dannan, Dan itself being a word expressive of magic skill. They could raise tempests by their art, and throw as much mist over their enemies as Macpherson himself over his Ossianic heroes.

Tales of oriental origin, as well as belief in necromancy, were known in Ireland in very early times, if her poetico-historical annals have any foundation in truth. The story of *Lavra Lyngshy*, one of the Irish monarchs who reigned some hundreds of years A. C., is so like that of the Phrygian king, Midas, that the one seems to be a transcript of the other. But the Irish version of it is in one respect an improvement. The important secret of the ears was communicated, not to the reeds, but to a willow; which willow being cut down and converted into a harp, resounded like the lyre of Anacreon, to only one favourite strain, "*Lavra Lyngshy, has the ears of a horse.*" This is a pretty invention, but we prefer *the ears of an ass* in the Phrygian tale, as containing a just satire on the monarch's taste. Keating says, with great gravity, that he conceives this to be

rather a romantic tale, than genuine history.—Keating's History, vol. i. p. 361. Dublin, 1811.

Mr. O'Reilly, in his valuable chronological account of Irish Writers, informs us that Beg Mac-De, an Irish bard, who died A. D. 550, condemned the practice of *sorcery* in a poem beginning *Ólc bʒc 4 upʒa*, "evil the practice of sorcery." He appears to have been a *μαντις κακων*, a prophet of plagues; for in another poem "he foretels the evils and destruction that were to fall on several places in Ireland."

It may readily be admitted then, that we can conclude nothing from the machinery of sorcery and enchantment employed in the Fenian tales, respecting their date. That it was antecedent to the invasion of Ireland by Henry the Second, may be inferred from the absence of all allusions to that event, as well as of images and ideas peculiarly English. We find nothing in them relative to the Sassenach, the Saxon, or English invader, though, in after times, that name became the burden of many a doleful and indignant strain: that it was subsequent to the introduction of Christianity, must be concluded from the frequency of their Christian allusions. Some of them may have been composed during the time of the Danish invasions, and been intended by their praises of the heroes of old, to stimulate the warriors of Ireland to expel the oppressors of their country. Others, like Conloch and the Chase, could have no such object. They appear to be of a character similar to that of the ballads of Robin Hood, Will Scarlet, and Little John. Blair's observation, that the imagery and description belong exclusively to the country in which the scene is laid, would apply to these poems much more strictly than to Macpherson's Ossian; though a few of their allusions may be of foreign growth, and some of their imagery was most injudiciously rejected by Macpherson, as unrefined and unclassi-



cal. The Fenian heroes are often represented as feasting and drinking together, giving mutual presents and playing at chess. They quarrel—a blow is heard ringing from the fist of one on the ear of another, like that of a sledge on an anvil. The striker is punished by a blow of superior force, which breaks three teeth, and by the force of his fall, two ribs.\* Oisin, in his conversations with Patrick, treats him with so little ceremony, that he sometimes gives him the lie direct. *Is bpeaz dhuytsh yn! a galcaime yn*, “*For you that is a falsehood! defamer of Fionn:*” (See *Λαοι na brajōas*, *Poem of Victory*,) and in the *Poem of the Chase*, calls him, in Miss Brooke’s translation:

“Patrick of the scanty store,  
And meagre-making face.”

*Naimh-Nuadh-Crothach*, the daughter of the fierce *Garbh Mac-Dolar*, speaking of the high king of Greece, her persecutor, says, *mo matlas ayn*, *my curse on him!* How would one of Macpherson’s heroes been horrified at such an expression from a lady of rank!

*Goll Mac-Morne* is described as a generous chief, always ready to spread his shield before his friends in danger. He is said in the poem of *Bhin Bolbin*, to come, not as Macpherson would have stated, like an eagle rushing from her cliffs on the wings of the roaring wind, but with the speed of a greyhound; swift as a weasel on a rabbit; natural and striking comparisons, though Macpherson may have thought them little accordant with his more lofty epic style, and as degrading perhaps to the least of his heroes, as the comparison in Homer, of Ajax, the bulwark of the Greeks, to an ass.

\* This quarrel forms the subject of the Irish poem, entitled “the Contestation of Goll with Luaidhe-ladir of hosts in the house of Teamor.” This poem is in Mr. Hardiman’s collection.

Similes, far from being crowded together in heaps, are not even frequent. The descriptions are generally brief, sometimes highly animated and picturesque. That of the horse or slender colt in the poem of "the Sixteen Men," occupies only three lines, and is as far from the elaborate, bombastic, epithet-abounding, description of Cuchullin's steeds in Macpherson, as nature and simplicity are from art and affectation.

"ba deay a glujne agur a beal,  
Cluaya beaga b; a; a cean,  
Mangoid tean agur rang eadtrom."

"On a colt he came  
Of well-formed knees and mouth, and slender frame,  
Small ears, light flank, and bold expanded chest."

Oisin's description of the fair enchantress in the poem of the Chase is more florid, and is certainly not equalled by any thing in Macpherson's poems. Addressing Saint Patrick, he tells him that Fionn—

By a lake of crystal sheen,  
Spies a nymph of loveliest form and mein.  
Her cheeks as the rose were crimson bright,  
Her lips the red berries' glow;  
Her breast as the blossoms downy white,  
Her brow as the virgin snow.  
Her locks were like the molten gold,  
Her eye as a freezing star:  
Shouldst thou, O sage, such nymph behold,  
Her beauty thy peace might mar.

These extracts are leading us from our subject; notwithstanding we are tempted to give another as beautifully descriptive of rural scenery. It is taken from the commencement of the poem, entitled "Bhin Bolbin."

Oisín speaks :

Bhí Bolbín thou art sad to day ;  
 Thou that wast erst of aspect gay  
     And lovely to be seen ;  
 O son of Calfruin ! then 'twas sweet,  
 To find a soft and mossy seat,  
     On its lofty summit green.

Thou hill of battles, stained with gore,  
     How oft thy fortress strong around,  
 Where dwelt a hero bold of yore,  
     Rose music sweet of horn and hound ;  
 The bittern round thee boomed at night,  
 The grouse, loud-whirring in her flight,  
 Peopled thy heath, and every tree  
 Rang with the small birds' melody.

Yes, 'twas delight to hear the cry  
     Of hounds along thy valleys sweep ;  
 To hear the rock's wild son\* reply  
     From every cliff and steep ;  
 To see the chiefs of the Fenian band,  
 To slip the greyhounds ready stand ;  
 And groups of maidens young and fair,  
 That plucked, as they went, the flowrets rare ;  
 With berries of every form and hue,  
 Of crimson blush, or of glossy blue,  
 From bramble and bush ; or cresses young,  
 That by the crystal streamlet sprung :  
 And passing sweet was the voice of their song,  
 As the fair-haired damsels roved along.

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\* *Mac-alla*, echo ; literally, the son of the rock.



Sweet too, by the source of the lonely stream,  
 To see aloof the eagle sail;  
 To hear her solitary scream,  
 Burst startling o'er the vale;  
 To hear the otter's whining note;  
 Or mid the hollow mountain rocks,  
 The barking of the wary fox;  
 Or mellow song of blackbird float  
 From bower and grove, o'er wood and lawn,  
 To evening hour from early dawn.

As he recollects the past, and contrasts it with his present forlorn situation, he falls into a strain of touching pathos :

With joy it thrilled my heart I vow,  
 To sit upon the mountain's brow;  
 And all the glorious landscape view,  
 The seven brave Fenian bands around,  
 In war, in peace, still faithful found—  
 But now my friends are few!  
 Then merry and gay, in the summer ray,  
 They frolicked and they shone;  
 With autumn's blast away they past,  
 And I am left alone.  
 My fate with tears, may dim your eye,  
 And wake your tender sympathy.

From such specimens we may conclude, that in whatever age these compositions were written, the art of poetry had been cultivated with some success. But we find in them nothing of the metaphysical thoughts of Macpherson, like "*the joy of grief*," or, as he might almost equally well have said, the *grief of joy*. Valour and generosity, particularly to the learned, are the frequent themes of eulogy, and sometimes we are favoured with a good prudential sentiment, as when Goll Mac-Morne is reminded in the poem of Dearg Mac-Dreithil, that—

"Le h-ucb cafa no comlaín  
Ní am fala do cúinneam."

"At the breast of battle or conflict  
It is no time to remember injury."

That other arts besides poetry had made some advances, may be learned from incidental notices. Medicine and surgery must have been subjects of great interest and attention, as we may infer from the establishment of an infirmary, west of the Shannon, to which Goll-Mac-Morne retired to be cured of the effects of the blow which he received from Luaidh-Laidir. A similar establishment existed at Carlow, to which Luaidh went for medical advice. Commerce must also have been an object of great importance, for among the concessions demanded of Fionn, when being on a visit to Teamor, he was treacherously seized, was the custom of all imported goods; and one of the rewards promised by king Cormac to Goll Mac-Morne, for overcoming Dearg Mac-Dreithil, was one-third of the harbour profits. Ship-building and navigation were studied of course, and these imply the manufacture of canvas, and a knowledge of metallurgy and working in iron. Nor were the heroes of the age strangers to magnificence in their entertainments, nor to the "pomp, pride, and circumstances of glorious war," for we read in their poems, of jewels and cups of gold; of polished reins and golden shields. In the poem of "the Sixteen Men," their banners are described as composed of crimson satin, variously and richly ornamented with emblematical blazonry.

Ireland, from the earliest ages, was addicted to the study of music and poetry; and at no period was she destitute of bards to celebrate the virtues of her kings and nobles. The deeds of the Fenian heroes were handed down in their strains from one generation to another, as the various tales of "Troy divine," among the poets of

Greece. But a Homer was wanting to make them his own, by recasting them in a new mould, and sending them from the mint of genius and taste, stamped with the image and superscription of the God of Song. As they passed from one age to another, they would necessarily undergo some alterations, and if any of them were of very ancient date, they must have been modernized in their language to render them intelligible ; for, as Mr. O'Reilly informs us, “ Eochaid O'Flin, a celebrated poet and historian, who died A. D. 984, wrote some poems which are still extant, accompanied with a copious gloss, *without which they could not be understood.*” Subjects of antiquity are always grateful to eminent poets. The more remote the age, the more favourable to the excursions of imagination. Heroic deeds become more heroic and venerable from years, and the mind turns with delight to visions of past glory, as if she felt warmed and animated by their splendor. The Irish bards were never forgetful of the deeds of their fathers. We learn from the above mentioned authority, that *Cuan O'Lochain*, “the most learned and celebrated antiquary and historian of Ireland,” in the beginning of the eleventh century, wrote a poem “on the splendor of the royal palace of Tarah, in the time of Cormac Mac-Art, monarch of Ireland, A. D. 250.” *Flann Mainistreach*, who flourished about the middle of the same century, wrote “on the deaths of the most remarkable of the Tuatha De-Danans, and the places where they died.” *Giolla na Naomh O'Dunn*, about the middle of the succeeding century, wrote a poem of 128 verses, “giving an account of the chief tribes descended from the three Collas, sons of Cairbre Liffeachair, monarch of Ireland, who was killed at the battle of Gabhra, A. D. 296,” in which battle Oscar, the son of Oisin, fell. After the English invasion, the bards found a subject of more immediate interest for the exercise of their art. *Angus Roe O'Daly*, who died in 1350, invoked O'Molloy,



the chief of Fearcall, "to spend his wrath upon the English, the plúnderers of his country;" and in 1380 *Mahon O'Reilly*, Lord of Clan Mahon, "was the author of a poem, in praise of the mighty actions of his son Thomas, who, in a short period, levelled eighteen castles belonging to the English of the Pale, and laid the country, from Drogheda to Dublin, under contribution. The poem begins, as translated; *The cry of an English sprite over Englishmen.*" Another poem in a similar strain is attributed to this O'Reilly by some writers, and by others to his chief poet Maurice O'Daly, beginning "*A cry of an English hag over Englishmen; that is a cry that I lament not.*"

But amidst all the distractions of a rent and bleeding land, the poems of the more celebrated *Fileas* were carefully preserved, in various volumes which obtained names from the compilers, or their proprietors, or the places where the compilations were made or deposited. Thus we have the books of Leacan, of Ballimote, of Howth, and of Glendaloch.

The book of the O'Kellys, a valuable Irish manuscript, in the possession of Sir William Betham, contains, with a vast variety of miscellaneous matter, "several poems of our earliest and most esteemed *Fileas*. Some of these are authentic history, and others are mixed with fable. Of this latter description are the poems on the Knights of the Red Branch; such as Cuchullin, Connal Cearnach, Curaidh Mac-Daire, Fergus Mac-Riogh; and of the Fianna Eirionn, or famous Irish militia, commanded by Fionn Mac-Cubhail, the Fin-gal of Macpherson, such as Goll Mac-Moírne, Dermod O'Duibhne, Caoilte Mac-Ronan, Conan Maol, Oisín, the poet, Oscar, son of Oisín."\* This book was transcribed by *Faelan Mac-a-Gobhan*, a learned historian, A. D. 1423.

\* See O'Reilly's Chronological Account, p. cxxiv. Sir William Betham would render a service to the cause of ancient Irish literature by having these poems translated.

## SECTION VII.

*Fin Mac-Cumhal and Oisín were Natives of Ireland, not of Scotland.*

SIR John Sinclair having shewn, to his own satisfaction, that “various Gaelic poems existed in the Highlands and islands of Scotland, in remote periods of their history,” proceeds in the third division of his dissertation, to shew that “those poems were said in a great measure to have been composed by Ossian, a Scottish bard, who celebrated the exploits of Fingal, a Scottish warrior.”

To prove this proposition, if possible, was indispensable to the proof of the authenticity of Ossian’s poems. The task was attended with much difficulty; but what will not the advocates of a favourite hypothesis attempt? The greater the paradox, the greater the renown of establishing its truth. In vain had Ireland possessed an undisputed claim to the warrior and the bard for 1500 years. In vain had her poets celebrated the actions of the one, and imitated the strains of the other. In vain had her historians handed down in written records, never to be effaced, the genealogy of both. In vain had they chronicled the age in which the son of Cumhal lived, the battles he fought, the monarch he served, the mode in which he died. All this was now to be set aside, and the popular traditions and the written annals of Ireland falsified, to make room for the fictions of Macpherson, who had metamorphosed the Irish general into a Caledonian king, and placed him on the throne of a kingdom which no muse of history has ever condescended to notice!

Sir John Sinclair endeavours to support his hypothesis, 1st, By the evidence of authors who never imagined that it would be a sub-

ject of disputation, or of any material consequence ; 2ndly, By the names of places in the Highlands, derived from Fingal and his heroes ; 3rdly, By many proverbial expressions in the Highlands which tend to confirm the idea ; and 4thly, By the concurring tradition of the inhabitants of the Highlands.

The first evidence adduced is Barbour, the oldest writer of Scotland, who mentions Fingal in "The Bruce," composed in 1375 :

He said "methink, Marthoky's son,  
Rycht as Gol-Mak-Morn was wone  
To haiff fra Fyngal his menyne,  
Rycht sua all hys fra us has he."

BRUCE, buke iii. 67-70.

This comparison was made by the Lord of Lorn, and is treated by Barbour with great scorn, as tending to lessen his hero Bruce ; but, says Pinkerton, "Barbour had no prophetic view of Ossian, and little suspected that Scotland would, in the eighteenth century, produce a Geoffrey of Monmouth." There is nothing in the lines relative to the country of Fingal. The only thing remarkable in them, as to the present question, is his name, which Pinkerton observes, is unknown to the Irish. *Gal*, the latter part of the compound, signifies *a stranger*, and being applied by Scotchmen to Fin the son of Cumhal, it affords a decisive proof that they did not consider him as their countryman.\*

\* "FIONN is not known in the Highlands," says Shaw, "by the name of *Fingal*. He is *universally* supposed to be an Irishman." When he asked of the Highlanders, who Fionn was, they answered 'an Irishman, if a man ;' for they sometimes thought him a giant ; and that he lived in Ireland, and sometimes came over to hunt in the Highlands. This is the universal voice of all the Highlanders, excepting those who are possessed of abilities and



The next proof is from Hector Boethius :

"Some conjecture that in those times lived Finnanus, the son of Cælus, (in common language Fyn-Mak-Coul,) a man, as they report, of an incredible stature, for they describe him as being seven cubits in height; he was of Scottish extraction, (*Scotici sanguinis*,) remarkable for the art of hunting, and in other exercises, to be dreaded, on account of the unusual size of his body."

This is an important quotation in this controversy. It lets us see clearly the true nature of the traditions preserved in Scotland respecting the Fenian chief. It demonstrates that he was not regarded as a star of chivalry, by whose light the youth of Caledonia might move to deeds of courtesy and feats of arms; but a mighty Nimrod (*Scotici sanguinis*) of Irish blood, for this is the proper interpretation of the Latin phrase, as all antiquaries know,\* who was wont to pursue the game of the Highland woods and mountains for his pastime, and whom the fears of the natives magnified into a giant whose enormous stature might vie with that of Otus and Ephialtes.

The third proof from Bishop Leslie's History of Scotland corroborates this fact :

"It is the opinion of many, that one Finnanus, the son of Cælus, (in our language called Fynmacoul,) a man of a huge size, and sprung as it were from the race of the ancient giants, at that time (namely in the reign of Eugenius II.) lived amongst us."

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knowledge to peruse the work of Macpherson, and are taught by nationality to support an idle controversy."—SHAW, p. 65.

There is not a word of Fingal in the *Chronicon Scotorum*, from which the list of Scottish kings is taken. The other characters of Ossian are not at all known among the Highlanders. They never heard of Swaran. More of him anon.

\* "From the eleventh to the fifteenth century, Usher deduces the words of writers who have used Scotia and Scots for Hibernia and Hibernians, concluding, we have the suffrages

Such testimonies as these prove more than the cause for which they are cited requires, and that the common traditional opinion, respecting Fin Mac-Cumhal, is hostile to that which is necessary to the Ossianic hypothesis. According to Buchanan, Eugenius II. died A. D. 452, more than a century and a half after the days of Fingal.

A quotation is next given from Bishop Douglas's "*Palice of Honour*," as *not inconsistent* with the idea, that Fingal and his heroes were of Scottish extraction :

"Great Gow-Mac-Morne, and Fyn-Mac-Cowl, and how  
They suld be goddis in Ireland, as they say."

The observation upon these words is extraordinary. "Those heroes might certainly be born in Scotland, though they might be accounted gods in Ireland!" It is possible, but by no means probable. Barbarous nations are not in the habit of deifying any heroes but their own. But, "the general tenor of the quotation," Sir John Sinclair thinks, "seems to justify that explanation. (We should think the contrary.) That this was the bishop's meaning is the more probable, because in a poem written about the same period, namely, in the reign of James IV., called '*The Interlude of the Droichis*,' Fyn Mac-Cowl is given to the Highlands :"

"My fore grandsyr, hecht Fyn Mac-Cowl,  
That dang the devil and gart him yowll,  
The skyis rained when he wald scowll,  
And trublitt all the air :

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of moderns carefully collected by D. Roth, Bishop of Ossory, an advocate for Ireland. But Ward, in the *Life of Saint Rumold*,\* says, as follows, of the present age : "We are certainly called at this very day Scots in Germany, as I shall demonstrate elsewhere from the engraved epitaphs of the Irish, and from the printed books of Germans of the first literary abilities yet living."—*OEGEIA*, vol. ii. p. 252. Dub. 1793.

\* Written in 1631.

He gat my grandschir Gog Magog ;  
 Ay when he dansit the warld wald schog ;  
 Five thousand ellis yeid in his frog,  
 Of *Hieland pladdis* of hair.”\*

Did the necessity of the argument require it, we might adopt Sir John’s mode of reasoning, and affirm, that though Fyn Mac-Cowl was the father of the person who spoke these lines, and who, it is presumed, was a Highlander, he might, notwithstanding, be an Irishman ; and though his frog, or frock, was made of *Hieland pladdis of hair*, he might be an Irishman still. But, really, it is a waste of time to confute serious conclusions deduced from premises so absurdly ludicrous as those laid down by the worthy baronet. Again, he tells us, that in Lyndsay’s *Satyre of the three Estates*, written in 1538, among the relicts produced by the pardoner, was :

“ Ane relict lang and braid  
 Of Fyn Mac-Cowl the richt chaft blaid  
 With teeth and all togidder.”

As for the decision of the question, it might as well have been the jaw-bone of Balaam’s ass.

He also quotes from Colville’s Whig Supplication, published 1681, the following lines :

“ One man, quoth he, oftentimes had stood,  
 And put to flight a multitude,  
 Like Samson, Wallace, and Sir Bewis,  
 And *Fyn Mac-Cowl beside the Lewis*.”

“ Evidently,” says Sir John, “ ascribing Fingal to the Hebrides or

\* *Aliter and mair.*



Western Islands, in the number of which it is well known the Isle of Lewis is included." But why Lewis? Evidently for the sake of rhyming with Sir Bewis. Had the third line runs thus,

Like Samson, Wallace, and the Bruce,

the next would have followed,

And Fyn-Mac-Cowl beside Dunluce :

with full as much propriety. But granting that Fyn, on account of some legend, were more properly spoken of in connexion with the Lewis, still this circumstance would no more determine his country, than the placing of Samson in connexion with Wallace, would demonstrate the slayer of the Philistines to be a native of Scotland. Nelson of the Nile, was not an Egyptian ; nor was Wellington of Waterloo, born in the Netherlands.

Sir John's next proof is taken from some lines addressed by Kirk, to his translation of the Psalms of David, published at Edinburgh in Gaelic, anno 1684.

" Little volume go boldly forth,  
Raise whom you reach to pure and godly strains ;  
Hail the generous land of Fingal's heroes,  
The Highland tracts and isles of the Hebrides."

These lines are given as the literal version of four lines in Gaelic. The two last lines in the original are these :

" Cuir failte *ar* fonn fial nab fionn,  
*Ar* gharbh chrioche is Inseabh Gall."

Literally :

“ Put welcome *upon* the generous land of the Fionns,  
*Upon* the rough territories, and the Inch-galls,” (viz. Hebrides.)

In “the generous land of Fingal’s heroes,” every unprejudiced mind will instantly recognize Ireland, in which country the author must have felt a natural wish for his book to become popular. That this was his meaning, might be reasonably concluded from the characteristic manner in which it is described; but the repetition of the preposition *ar* upon, if we mistake not, is decisive. Had *the generous land of Fingal’s heroes*, and *the rough territories of the Highlands*, been the same, would not the insertion of *ar* between them have been not only superfluous, but destructive of their intended identity?

To the Scottish authorities in favour of his hypothesis, Sir John adds that of Colgan, an Irish author of great learning and research; for Colgan, in a note, says of Fingal, (or *Finnius, filius Cubhalli*), that he was much celebrated in poems and tales *inter suos*, “by which he must necessarily mean that he belonged to Scotland, and not to Ireland, as in this case he would have written *inter nostrates*.” Pro-di-gi-ous! A common reader would suppose that by *suos*, his own, the author meant Finn’s own people, his contemporaries; *milites* or *amicos*, being the substantive understood, and that he had no intention whatever to designate him as a foreigner. If he were so, why introduce him at all rather than Galgacus, or any other stranger? What should we think of the critic, who would attempt to prove that our Saviour was not a native of Judea, because the apostle John has written, that “he came to his own, and his own (οἱ ἱδιοὶ) received him not?” According to our learned critic’s rule, had John been able to claim Christ as his compatriot, he would have written, not οἱ ἱδιοὶ but ἡμεδαποὶ!

This topic has been dwelt on at much greater length than it merits. But as it is of some importance in the controversy, it was judged proper to shew on what flimsy grounds the advocates of Macpherson's Ossian are contented to rest their belief, and how the very arguments they employ to support, only subvert their cause. In not one of the passages quoted by Sir John Sinclair, is Fin Mac-Cumhal distinctly stated to be a native of Caledonia; and as for Ossian, he is not mentioned at all. A more abortive attempt to uphold a baseless fabric, is not to be found in the annals of literature.

Having marshalled his historical proof, Sir John has recourse to tradition. He states that—

“All over the Highlands, the names of Ossian, Fingal, Comhal, Trenmor, Cuchullin, and the other heroes, are still familiar, and held in the greatest respect. Straths or valleys, mountains, rocks, rivers, are named after them. There are a hundred places in the Highlands and isles which derive their names from the Feinne, and from circumstances connected with their history.”

Granting all this, what does it prove, when it can be shewn, on undeniable authority, that there are as many places in Ireland of which the same may be predicated? Where is the spot, from Fin Mac-Cumhal's *quoit* at the hill of Howth, to Cuchullin's leap, (Loop-head,) at the mouth of the Shannon, and thence to Luirgeadan, and the beautiful vale of Glenarriff, in the County of Antrim, that is not familiar with such appellations? \* Their frequency in Scotland only

\* We have the great rock in the County of Meath, under the shelter of which Fin and his faithful wolf-dog Bran once rested, after a fatiguing pursuit; † and on the top of the hill of Shanthamon, in the County of Cavan, may be seen his “*Fingers*,” in the shape of five enormous stones, each about five feet high, and of four tons weight. ‡

† Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. xv. Antiq. p. 167.

‡ Id. vol. xiii. Antiq. p. 127.



argues the frequency of the Irish invasions of that country, and the success that attended them. It has been stated that the celebrated cave in the island of Staffa derives its name from the son of Cumhal. Even if it did, it would only be a record of the extent of the Irish warrior's fame. But this cave derives its name, as probably at least, from a natural cause. All tourists by whom it is visited, are pleasantly surprised to hear the musical echo produced by the percussion of the waves at its extremity, and hence\* it has been denominated in the Gaelic tongue, *Uagh-na-bhine*, the musical grotto, corrupted into *Uagh-na-Fin*, to favour Macpherson's fictions.

Before the days of Macpherson, the claims of Ireland to Fionn Mac-Cumhal, to Oisín, and the Fenian heroes, were never disputed, more than the claims of Greece to Achilles and Homer. The bards and historians of Ireland had recorded the genealogy of her hero, the names of his sons and daughters, his dog, his standard, and the fabricator of his arms, the king whom he served, the civil strife in which he was engaged. She could point to the scenes of his exploits; to the palace of Almhuin, in Leinster, where he dwelt; to the banks of the Boyne, where he fell; to the top of Slievé Gullen, where he is said to be entombed. She could repeat numerous tales of the achievements of his heroes; and no farther proof is wanting to shew the undisputed justice of her claims, than the impotent efforts of Sir John Sinclair to set up an opposite claim for Scotland, founded on false inferences, drawn from ludicrous rhymes and extravagant fictions of a comparatively modern date. The most ancient records he has been able to produce, are those of Barbour and Boethius,†

\* Pinkerton, in his Geography, ascribes the name either to this circumstance, or to the harmonious arrangement of the columns.

† "Antiquissima quæ de Finno extant Scotorum Albiensium testimonium, Sæculum, xivtum

and they prove nothing on the subject, except that the name of Fin Mac-Cumhal was not to them altogether unknown. But Ireland goes to higher sources; and she has the steady beacon light of chronology and history to guide her. She has written annals to which she appeals, handed down in various transcripts from generation to generation; and almost all writers who have treated of her history and antiquities, notice the fondness of her natives for music and poetry, her bards and senachies, her fictions, romances, and superstitions, as connected with the names of Fionn and Oisín. Camden says of the Irish, "they suppose the soules of such as are deceased, goe into the company of certaine men, famous in those places, touching whom they reteine still fables and songs, as of gigantes, Fyn Mac-Huyle, Osker Mac-Oshin; and they say, that by illusion they oftentimes doe see such."\* And again, their "potentates also have their historians about them, who write downe their acts and deeds; they have their phisitians also, and *Rymers* whom they call bards, yea, and their harpers, who have every one of them their severall livelods and lands set out for them; and of these there be in each territorie severall professours, and those liable to some certaine and severall families."† Thus Campion also, in his History, published in Dublin, 1633, says of the Irish, "greedy of praise they bee, and fearefull of dishonour, and to this end they esteeme their poets who write Irish learnedly, and penne their sonnetts heroical, for the which they are bountifully rewarded. But if they send out libells in dispraise, thereof the gentlemen, especially the meere Irish, stand in great awe."—p. 14.

non excedunt, Barbourii nempe, et Boethii.—*Vide* Report of the Committee of the Highland Society, p. 21.—O'Connor, Hib. Script.

\* Camden's Ireland, p. 147, Lond. 1610.

† Id. Ireland, p. 141.

The following extract from an old MS. history of Ireland,\* relative to Fin Mac-Cumhal and his strife with the Clanna-Morna, may be satisfactory to the reader :

“ Cairbre Lithfeachair, the son of King Corbmac, obtained the crowne, and was nicknamed Lithfeachair, because he was fostered near the river Liffey in Leinster, in which place he tooke great delight : this monarch was killed in the battle of Gabhra, which was fought upon this occasion.

“ There were two septs of the Fions of Ireland, the Clanna-Morna, and the Clanna Boisgne. This Boisgne was father to Cumhall, who was Fion’s father, (commonly called Fion Mac-Cumhall.) Fion had a son and daughter. The daughter was called Samhair, and was married to Corbmac Cais, king of Munster, by whom he had three sons, Tine, Conla, and Mogha Cuirb. This Mogha Cuirb was king of Munster in the reign of this monarch Cairbre. Fion Mac-Cumhall’s son was called Oisin, and was head of the Clanna Boisgne, who falling at difference with the Clanna Morna, was protected and assisted by Mogha Cuirb, his sister’s husband. The Clanna-Morna, who were then the monarch’s mercenary souldiers, were headed by Aodh Caomh, son of Garadh Glundubh, son of Morna, assisted and backed by the monarch Cairbre ; soe that this civill warr continued betweene the Fions for seven years ; and at length the Clanna-Morna provoked the monarch and the other princes of Ireland to warr upon Mogha Cuirb, king of Munster, because he protected the Clanna Boisgne, hoping by that meanes that they should be deserted by the king of Munster, and so be utterly expelled the kingdom, which the monarch did, (although that Oisin was his owne daughter’s son.) But the king of Munster stuck faithfully to the Clanna Boisgne, whereupon ensued the battaile of Gabhra, wherein the monarch Cairbre was slain after he had reigned twenty-seven years.”

O’Flaherty in his *Ogygia*, speaking of Cormac, the 126th monarch of Ireland, says :

“ He had a son-in-law Fin married to his daughter Grania,† but as she eloped with Diermoit O’Duibhne, he had his other daughter, Albea, married to him, who was the son of

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\* This history is in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy.

† This Grania is changed by Macpherson into the more mellifluous sound *Ros-crana*. Thus unblushingly does he alter names as he utters forgeries, which he presents to his rea-



Cuball, by Mornia, daughter to the Druid Thady, of the family of O'Baisgne, the descendants of Nuad the White, monarch of Ireland; he was generalissimo of the Irish militia, highly distinguished for his jurisprudence, dissertations on which, written by him, are extant; for his poetical compositions in his native language, and as some write, for his prophecies: he has, on account of his noble military exploits, afforded a vast field of panegyric and encomium to the poets.\*

The same annalist gives a detail of the grounds of dispute between the rival clans of Boisgne and Morna, in the reign of Carbry Liffechar, and states that—

“In the heat of the battle (of Gabhra,) Carbry and Osgar, the grandson of Finn, by Ossin, came to single combat. The king, all covered with wounds, slew his antagonist, but he was killed dealing death around him with undaunted bravery, by Simeon, the son of Kirb, of the race of the Fotharts.”†

These are facts of which Macpherson could not be ignorant. Neither could it be unknown to him that part of Argyleshire was colonized by the Irish under Cairbre Riada,‡ that they took posses-

ders for true history.—See the first note to the eighth book of *Temora*. *Quis tam ferreus ut teneat se?*

Our celebrated Irish beauty *Deirdre*, he has also metamorphosed into *Darthula*.

“In the first publication of poems from the *Erse*, he calls his bard *Oscian*, and in the latter translations, *Ossian*. This shews his little knowledge of the *Gaelic*, or *Scottish* language. *Oisin* is the true reading, and so written in all our ancient manuscripts.”—O’Conor’s *Dissertations*.

\* *Ogygia*, vol. ii. p. 242. Dublin, 1793.

† *Id.* p. 246.

‡ “The Dalriadinians almost three hundred years after this Carbry, their progenitor, being headed by generals of the same family, the sons of Eric, who was the son of Achy Munreamhar, set sail from *Dalrieda in Britain*, to the north of the bay of Dunbritton, contiguous to the boundaries of the ulterior Roman province, comprehending Kentire, Knapdal, Lorna, Argyle, and Brun-alban, (or Braid-alban,) with the neighbouring islands. The most eminent and distinguished of the sons of Eric, were the posterity of Fergus, who founded a Scottish monarchy, from whom the most illustrious kings of Great Britain and Ireland are descended.—*Ogygia*, ii. 221.

sion of it either by treaty or conquest, "*amicitia aut ferro*," and gave it their name, their language, and their laws. The venerable Bede accords with all our ancient Irish historians, in attesting the reality of the Dalriadan settlement, which, it might be presumed, if facts were wanting to prove it, kept up a constant intercourse with the mother country. Hill, in his Collection of ancient Erse Poems, says truly, "if we may reason from a part to the whole, it is just to conclude that all the songs preserved in the Highlands relative to the Fingallians are Irish. They are wholly confined to the western coast of the Highlands opposite Ireland, and the very traditions of the country themselves acknowledge the Fingallians to be originally Irish."

Pinkerton in his Essay on the Origin of Scottish Poetry, agrees with Hill. "I take Fingal and his heroes," says he, "to have been the leaders of the Scots from Ireland, as Odin and his heroes led the Goths from Asia. This opinion is confirmed by the whole traditional poems in the Highlands, which, however stated by Mr. Macpherson, always represent Fingal as contemporary with Saint Patrick, who flourished about 430." (p. xli.)

Hume is of the same opinion. He observes that "the name of Erse, or Irish, given by the low country Scots to the language of the Scottish Highlanders, is a certain proof of the traditional opinion, delivered from father to son, that the latter people came originally from Ireland." "To this," continues Pinkerton, "it may be added, that the old Scottish poets and writers uniformly call the Highlanders, Irish."

The argument then which Sir John Sinclair would found on the concurring traditions of the inhabitants of the country, recoils against himself, and lays his hypothesis prostrate. The traditions of Scotland are corroborated by those of Ireland and her bards, her musicians,

historians, critics, antiquaries, and whole legions of literati; traditions, not left floating in the breath of the vulgar, but transmitted by written parchment documents from one age to another, and incorporated with the history of her kings and legislators.

From the proverbs connected with the name of Fin Mac-Cumhal and his heroes, nothing can be argued in favour of Sir John's theory, unless it can be shewn that they are peculiar to the Highlands, and not of foreign extraction. The fame of illustrious men travels far, and it had been strange, indeed, if that of the Fenian heroes, even though they had never formed a settlement in Scotland, had not been resounded in her valleys and mountains, and rendered familiar to women and children.

Their chief was like

"The Talbot, so much famed abroad,  
That with his name the mothers stilled their babes."

But the proverbial sayings which Sir John would fondly array in his cause, are not indigenous to Scotland. They are all completely Irish, and only afford a proof of the stability and long duration of the Irish dominion, language, and customs, in the Highlands. The justice of Scotland's claims to Fingal and his Fenians, is not demonstrated by "the Clan Campbell tracing their descent from those heroes." For Irish genealogists derive that family from a higher source, and shew that the Campbells of Argyle may boast of *Lugady*, father of *Tea* or *Thais*, the wife of Heremon, as one of their progenitors.\* In farther corroboration of his opinions, Sir John states that

\* See *Ogygia Vindicated*, p. li. Fothad Connan, (says O'Flaherty, *Ogygia*, ii. p. 230,) the son of king Mac-con, has been the original founder of the Campbells, (in Irish, Mac-Cathlin,) earls of Argyle in Scotland.



“Cuchullin was the chief of Dunscaich, in the island of Sky.” According to the worthy baronet’s style of argument, we might reply; certainly he might be a chief of Dunscaich, and at the same time a native of Ireland. But Cuchullin was altogether Hibernian, and allied to his country by ties too many and too strong to be severed by the critical knife of Sir John Sinclair, or Macpherson. His genealogy and family connexions may be seen at length in the second volume of *Ogygia*, p. 162, and much of his romantic history in Keating. “He fell by the sword of the sons of Calitin,” in the twenty-seventh year of his age, and the second of the Christian era, more than two hundred years before the days of Fin Mac-Cumhal, with whom Macpherson makes him contemporary!

Farther it is alleged, that “Fergus, and not Ossian, was, according to Irish tradition, the chief bard of the Irish Fingal, though his works are hardly known in Scotland; and that the poems attributed to the Irish Ossian, were composed between the eighth and twelfth centuries, whereas the poems of (the Scotch) Ossian, are ascribed by their traditions to some of the most remote periods of which there is any account in the history of Scotland.”

They might as well be ascribed to years beyond the flood. What avails the ascription of them to any period of profound darkness? We want light and proof. It is notorious that they are not mentioned in any Scotch history a hundred years old. Admitting that Fergus was the chief bard of Fingal, what advantage is gained by the admission? There were hundreds of bards in Erin, some of whom may have contested the palm with Oisín, as Hesiod is said to have contested it with Homer. But the name of Oisín is unquestionably the most celebrated, as is apparent from his being represented as the narrator of all the exploits of the Fenian heroes, in dialogues with Saint Patrick. Sir John observes that the latter name “is introduced

into the Irish poems, never in the Scotch." A proof, we reply, of the diligent care with which it has been excluded, lest its presence should betray a principal source of Macpherson's centos.

Ample amends, however, have been made for the exclusion of one name, by the introduction of several, which are found no where else, such as Swaran, Acandecca, and Fainasollis. These names Sir John thinks, "clearly indicate that the poems (the Irish and the Scotch) were originally different." They indicate more clearly that Macpherson knew the value of sweet-sounding, romantic names, and that he had ingenuity to compound them from Irish roots, and modulate them to please an English ear. As for the personages whom they were intended to represent, they never had any existence but in his own imagination.

NOTE.—"The name of FINGAL was never given to Fin by the Irish or by the Highlanders. It was applied to him only by the Lowland Scots, and perhaps means *Fin-gael*, or *Fin the Irishman* by eminence. That Fingal was the same person with the Irish *Fin Mac-Cuwal* (Cumhail) is clear from the identic names of the father Cuwal, the son Oisin, the grandson Oskir, (Osgar,) and from the old Scottish poets who sometimes call his person Fingal, sometimes *Fin Mac-Coul*. The names of his companions, Gaul son of Morni, &c., also coincide both in Irish and Highland tradition, so that the identity of *Fin Mac-Cuwal* and *Fingal* is demonstration. His formation of a regular standing army called *Fianna Eirionn*, or the Phenians of Ireland, trained to war, in which all Irish accounts agree, must have been a rude imitation of the Roman legions in Britain. Buchanan gives an account of the Feans, or legions of Fin, and speaks of rude rhymes on the actions of Fin Mac-Coel, as retained by the Irish and Scottish Highlanders. The idea, though simple enough, shews prudence, for such a force alone could have coped with the Romans had they invaded Ireland."—Buchanan's Account of the family of Buchanan, Edinburgh, 1723, 4to. Pinkerton's Scot. vol. ii. part iv. c. 2. quoted from a note to the "*Annales iv. Magistrorum*," by Doctor O'Connor, p. 89.

## SECTION VIII.

*On the Topography of Ossian's Poems.*

CRITICS and antiquaries have found much pleasure in investigating the topography of Troy and the scenes of Homer's battles. Why should not Sir John Sinclair and his Highland friends find similar pleasure in investigating and describing the scenes where Fingal fought and Ossian sang? The former, indeed, had certain geographical guides to direct them; well-known headlands, the isle of Tenedos, the river Simois, and the Hellespont. If such guides be wanting to Ossian, the greater must be the topographical ingenuity which can discover and describe his scenery without them.

Mr. Alexander Stewart, A. M., has favoured Sir John Sinclair, and, through him, the public, with a brief description of Selma :

"In which he says, there is reason to believe that Selma, the principal residence of Fingal, is that part of Argyleshire, call Upper Lorn, now called by the inhabitants *Dun-Mhic-Snitheachain*, i. e. the fort of the son of Snitho, but by some of our historians *Berigonium*,\* and by them said to have been once the capitol of the kingdom of the Gaels or Caledonians. On the top of this hill are still to be seen vestiges of extensive buildings, with fragments of the walls, bearing evident marks of fire, scattered along the sides of the hill."

He then quotes some passages from Doctor Smith's ancient poems, descriptive, as he imagines, of the scenery :

"The chase had ceased and the deer slept  
Under the shadow of trees on the moss;

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\* Berogomum. Camden.



The *curtain of night descended* on the hills,  
 And heroes were feasting in Selma.  
 There was song after song, as the custom was,  
 There was that and the music of harps,  
 With the barking of dogs in the interval of action,  
 From the rock which rises over the white beach."

The *white beach* in the last line

"Answers exactly the present aspect of the white sand which covers the shore around part of the hill on which Selma stood. The rock from which the dogs were heard to bark is here also, for that part of the hill washed by the waves, is composed of rock, and rises almost perpendicular to the sea. But if this be not the rock alluded to in the poem, *there is another rock* within a few hundred yards of Selma, to which the description is equally applicable."

And to what is the modern theatrical image of *the curtain of night descending*, applicable? By what proleptic vision did the old blind bard discover that idea? Was he enabled in the fury of prophetic inspiration to peep through Shakespeare's "blanket of the dark," and anticipate the moderns in the use even of their own property? The rock and the sandy beach in regions abounding with islands and gulfs, are no doubt very characteristic! The description would apply to the hill of Howth, or to Ireland's Eye, and the fine shelly strand of Portmarnock; or if these be not the scenes alluded to, *there is another rock* at Cairnalloch, or Red-bay, or Portrush, or Magilligan!

The learned topographer having thus distinctly pointed out the rock and the sandy beach, leads us to the ruins of the royal palace:

"In Selma, or Taura, or Temora,  
 There is no shell, nor song, nor harp!  
 They are all become green mounds,  
 And their stones half sunk in their own meadows."

“The description,” he says, “given of Selma after its fall, in the third and fourth lines of this passage, corresponds exactly to the present appearance of the ruins of the place.” The just inference from which observation is, that the description was *recently* made. Had it been made on the place, and at the time when Selma was burned, the ruins would not have been green mounds, nor the stones half sunk in their own meadows.

Other quotations are made to shew that Selma, or Taura, or Temorah, for Taura, he supposes, is but another name for Selma, was near the shore on an eminence, and commanded a prospect of the sea: just such a situation, we presume, as Horace would have selected for his country residence :

“ Illic vivere vellem  
Oblitus meorum, oblivescendus et illis;  
Neptunum procul e terra spectare furem.”

Or where Lucretius might have stood, while he sang :

“ Suave, mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis, &c.”

Such are the very discriminating circumstances by which we are to discover the royal habitation of the king of Morven! Selma is a word of liquid cadence, and shews the musical ear of its inventor. It seems to have been suggested by the Irish Almhuin, the real name of Fin Mac-Cumhal's abode, if it be not rather an anagram of the Hebrew *Salem*. Tarah is a well-known and oft-repeated name in Irish history and poetry. The corruption of its orthography to Taura, is too impotent a device to transfer its site to the wilds of Caledonia. To achieve this would require the aid of a more powerful wizard

than Macpherson, with all his host; such a *Merlin redivivus* as transported "*the giants' dance*," the rocks of Stonehenge from the Curragh of Kildare to the plain of Salisbury.

Arda also is mentioned in Smith's collection, and the chorographer on whom we are commenting, supposes it to be the same as Ardach,

"a place well known at this day, which lies about half way between Stirling and Crief, and where are vestiges of one of the greatest Roman camps to be seen in Scotland. That the Romans were enemies whom the Fingallians completely defeated, and dispersed at Arda, appears evident from part of the same poem being the song of triumph which the maids of Morven sang, when they came forth to congratulate their heroes on their return."

This passage reminds us of the daughter of Jephthah coming out with timbrels and dances, to hail her father's return; and of the women of Israel chanting the triumph of David. But in what historian is this complete defeat of the Romans by the Fingallians mentioned? The Romans were not in the habit, more than the modern Britons,\* of concealing their defeats, or the names of their enemies. Under whose reign did it happen? How many Roman eagles were lost? In what hall or temple were they deposited? And why did the victors return to the "rock and the white beach," and not follow up their "complete" victory by the total expulsion of their enemies from the island? for it will scarcely be maintained that the battle of Ardach, if ever there was such a battle, extinguished the Roman power in Britain. Verily, we shall again require the aid of Merlin to solve these questions.

Doctor Graham is willing to give up Macpherson here. "Of his dreams," he says, "he makes no account." He rejects the

\* Voltaire observes that the English never conceal the number of their slain in battle.



connexion of his poems with the Roman history, and the fiction of his wars with Caracalla and Carausius; but maintains that conflicts between the Romans and Caledonians were common; though, at this distance of time, we cannot tell who was the hero “of the furious eye,” or “Caros king of ships.” The word *Roman*, he remarks, occurs not, because Ossian denominates individuals from their personal qualities; and countries, mountains, and rivers, by appellations deduced from “the circumstances by which they are peculiarly distinguished.”

It was prudent at least, in Macpherson, to deal in general description, and to designate heroes, not by real names, but by such loose epithets and adjuncts, that if they did not apply to one, they might easily be transferred to another. The mention of Caracalla was unfortunate. It shot a beam of light through the Highland mist in which he wrapt himself, and exposed him to the critical shaft of Gibbon. It might have excited the wonder of a less acute judge, “that the son of Severus, who, in the Caledonian war, was known only by the name of Antoninus, should be described in these poems by a nickname invented four years afterwards, and scarcely used by the Romans, till after the death of the emperor.” Macpherson was ignorant of this fact, or, we may rest satisfied, we should never have heard of the name of Caracalla in connexion with the poems of Ossian.

But though Doctor Graham gives up Caracalla, he will not so easily part with Lochlin. He observes that Laing, “with his usual gratuitousness of assumption, affirms that the name was unknown till the ninth century.” This he endeavours to disprove by a manuscript which Astle thought was written in the ninth or tenth, and which appears to have been composed between the fifth and eighth; and by the authority of Doctor Smith, who quotes a Welsh manu-

script of the seventh century, in which we read that “the warlike Irp conducted a fleet to *Llychlyn*; on which Mr. Edward Llhuyd remarks, that by this name we understand Sweden, Denmark, and Norway.” We think, with due respect to Doctor Graham, that Mr. Laing does not indulge in gratuitous assumptions, but generally assigns such reasons for his opinions as are more easily contradicted than refuted. But another critic who has investigated the subject more profoundly than either Mr. Laing or the Doctor, one to whom all others must yield the palm, Doctor O’Conor, author of “*Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores*,” one to whom all the stores of Celtic literature are laid open, and who treasured in his mind all its various lore, is of the same opinion as Mr. Laing:

“Nomen Lochlan,\* quod in iisdem carminibus fictis centies pro Danis ponitur, penitus ignotum fuit, et inauditum ante sæculum christianum, quo tempore, Danis ab Hiberniæ incolis impositum fuit, quia in lacubus *Eachense, Ribhense, Feabhalinse, Orbsenense*, &c. hiemare solebant, ut eo commodius Mediterraneas insulæ regiones et monasteria infestarent. Pro *canone enim irrefragabili* statuendum est, nullum esse, non modo codicem, verum etiam carmen, aut opus quodcunque, in quo vox *Lochlan* pro Dano, vel Norwegio ponitur, quod non sit sæculo decimo recentior, cum antea nullo alio vocabulo quam *Gal*, ullo unquam tempore, Hibernice designati fuerint.”—Hib. Script. Ep. Nun. p. cxxii.

Another mark of the true scenery of Ossian is found by Mr. Stewart in “a great cataract, or waterfall, about two short miles south of Selma, a short space above the ferry of Connuil, where Loch Eite discharges itself into the sea. This fall answers so well to the description of the Eas Laoire of Ossian, and Macpherson’s Lora,

\* “Vox Lochlan proprie,” Lacuum Incolas, “significat, et a sæculo nono in usu erat ad indicandos Norwegos et Danos qui Hiberniæ lacus abinde infestabant. Utrum antea in usu fuerit ad indicandos Piratas Saxonicos ignoro. Danorum nomen ignotum fuit in Europa ante ann. 570. Hiberniam primum aggressi sunt anno æræ com. 807, non. 832, ut scribit Flahertus.”—O’Conor, Tigher. ann. p. 24, note.

that it will be in vain to look for it any where else." But notwithstanding this positive assertion, he differs from Macpherson three pages after, and affirms, that the latter must be mistaken in making Lora to be a small stream, as he describes it to be, in a note to the fifth book of Temora. He concludes that "those who endeavour to fix the origin of Ossian to any modern period, or ascribe the original merit to any modern bard, can do it from no other reason than prejudice or ignorance."

As this censure falls on a very numerous class, in which we include ourselves, we may be allowed to express a wish that the learned topographer had taken some more efficient mode of eradicating our prejudice and instructing our ignorance, as we profess a willingness to be informed. Since he describes the scenery of Selma so minutely, by what unaccountable oversight has he forgotten to notice "Strumon, stream of the hill, the name of the seat of the family of Gaul, in the neighbourhood of Selma?" "Gordon, to favour a foolish hypothesis, about Agricola's camp, asserted that the people of the country call the spot Galgachan, to this day, which proved to be an absolute falsehood."\* Until we receive more satisfactory proof than Mr. Stewart has laid before us, we shall adhere to our prejudice and ignorance in believing with Shaw, that "no such kingdom as Morven was ever known in the west of Scotland. The name of Morven, although at home it is called Morairna, sounded well, and for no other reason suited the author's plan, though it is never once mentioned in any of their tales or songs. The district known at this day by that name is only a part of the parish of that name. Selma is not at all known in Scotland."†

\* Pinkerton's Essay on the Origin of Scotch Poetry, p. xxix.

† Shaw's Inquiry, p. 63.



From the silence of Buchanan we are led to the same conclusion. He says not a word of the kingdom of Morven, or the Palace of Selma, of Fingal or Ossian, whereas he would have assigned them a conspicuous place in his history, had he ever heard of them in connexion with his country. The tales which have been invented respecting them would have been exactly adapted to his taste. For, as Robertson the historian testifies, "instead of rejecting the improbable tales of chronicle writers, he was at the utmost pains to adorn them, and hath clothed with all the beauties and graces of fiction, those legends which had formerly only its wildness and extravagance." Moreover he was led to the subject so directly, that there was scarcely a possibility of avoiding it, had it not been a nonentity. He gives a minute enumeration and description of the Hebrides. He notices hundreds of the small islands. Even Staffa, though in his days no object of curiosity, does not escape his observation; but he drops not a hint of the renowned kingdom of the woody echoing Morven. He speaks of the manners and customs of the inhabitants, and says, "they sing songs not inelegant, containing commonly the eulogies of valiant men, and the bards usually treat of no other argument. Instead of a trumpet they use a bagpipe. They are much given to music, but on instruments of a peculiar kind, called clarsachs." Of Ossian there is no notice.

Erin is very frequently mentioned in Macpherson's Ossian, and made the scene of the poem of Temora. In the fourth book of this poem, Fingal says, that having left Selma, on the following morning, "Erin rose in mist. We came into the bay of *Moilena*, where its blue waters tumbled in the bosom of echoing woods."\* In vain have

\* Again we are told in Temora, book vii., that "Culbin's Bay received the ship in the bosom of echoing woods."

we consulted maps and other sources of geographical information for this bay. As mountains and headlands, friths, rivers, and bays, are the last places which change their names, even amidst all the revolutions of years, the conquests of the sword, and the changes of language; how has *Moilena* had the misfortune to lose its name in a country which still retains its original tongue? \* We can recognize the old district of Reuda (*Dal-Riada*) in the modern name of Route, in the County of Antrim; and Macpherson's *Innistore* in Tory Island, which he has been pleased to transfer to the Orkneys, and his *Innishuna* in our own Innishowen, which he would dis sever from its native land, and transport to "that part of south Britain which is over against the Irish coast!" But as for the bay of *Moilena*, we verily believe it is to be found no where but in the *terra incognita* of his own imagination. Walker, in his History of the Irish Bards, (p. 40,) says, that in the County of Donegal, there is a cloud-capt mountain, called *Alt Ossoin*, around which, according to a learned writer, is the whole scenery so finely described by Macpherson in his Oisín's Poems; and to the northward of Lough Derg, are the mountains, caverns, and lakes of Fin." Another author says, that "the traveller, when he finds himself in the vale of Glenariff,

\* Moylena, a plain in Ferakelly, in the King's County, was the scene of a famous pitched battle between Conn of the Hundred Battles and Eugenius Mognuad the Great, of the Hiberian line, king of Munster, in which the latter was defeated and slain. He fell by the hand of Goll, the son of Morna, of the race of Saub, king of Connaught. "There are yet to be seen at this place two hills, in one of which, we are informed, the body of Eugenius was interred, and the corps of *Fræch* the Spaniard, who was also slain there, was entombed in the other."† The celebrated Irish champion, Goll Mac-Morna, is metamorphosed by Macpherson into Gaul, "Fingal's best friend and greatest hero," and, by way of compensation, we suppose, for being robbed of his country, and made a Caledonian, compared to the Grecian Ajax.‡

† Ogygia, part iii. c. lx.

‡ Note at the conclusion of the third book of Fingal.

on the coast of Antrim, may *conceive* that he beholds the scenery of the *genuine* Ossian. We recollect to have seen, many years ago, an old gentleman in the County of Antrim, who fancied he had discovered the whole topography in the neighbourhood of the *Six Mile Water*; and in a recent work by Hugh Y. Campbell, Esq. R. N. F. A. S., it is laid down and described as lying on the western shores of the bay of Carrickfergus, and about the mountains of Carnmoney and Cavehill. Why has not the County of Wicklow put in its claim? Macpherson's descriptions will apply to it as well as to Morven. It has mountains and valleys; whistling heath and blue streams; grey rocks and a sandy beach, with curling mists and rainbow skies.

"In truth," says the learned author of "Dissertations on the History of Ireland," "there would be no end of pointing out the topographical ignorance of *Ossian*, in omitting as well as misplacing some of the most noted places of Ireland, which must naturally come within the plan of his poems; his invention, however, is very prolific; and is particularly so where poetry wants it least, or is disgraced by it. Instead of *Eamhain*, or *Eamania*, the celebrated seat of the kings of *Ulster*, which *Ossian* never once mentions, we have the castle of *Tura*, many ages before a single castle was built in the kingdom: and instead of *Craove-roe*, the academy near *Eamania*, for teaching the use of arms; he gives us Muri's Hall, a name as little known to all ancient writers as *Tura* itself. From numberless instances of such forgeries, omissions, and misplacings, the reader will be enabled to form a proper judgment of *Ossian*, as well as *Ossian's translator*."



## SECTION IX.

*On the Era of Ossian.*

THE era of the real Fin Mac-Cumhal, and his son Oisín, is as distinctly marked in Irish history as any other event which it records. It appears evident from the chronological researches of Doctor Charles O'Connor, that the former fell in the year of our Lord 273, and that Oscar, his grandson, fell ten years afterwards, viz. in 283, at the battle of Gavra. Hence it will appear scarcely credible, unless Fin could be proved to have lived to an antediluvian age, that he commanded an army against the Romans in 207, as has been pretended; and that he defeated them under Caracalla, at the west end of Loch Fraochy "where there is a place named Dall-Chillin, or Fingal's burial-place."

We have asked in a former section of this Essay, who has recorded this defeat of the Romans? and Graham answers, that it is not to be expected that Tacitus, Herodian, or Dion Cassius, would give us any account of the poems in which such events are recorded. True, not of the poems; but why not of the battles in which the Romans were overcome, and the names of the generals against whom they fought? They have told of Galgacus and Caractacus; why not of a greater than they, the illustrious Fingal? The Doctor employs a negative argument, and contends that "nothing has been adduced from ancient history, or even from the poems themselves, which can fairly be considered as contradictory to the position, that they belong

to the period which has been assigned." Here we are obliged to differ from the learned Doctor, for we think in almost every page we can discover palpable proofs of modern fabrication, and are well assured that they cannot be authenticated by a single contemporary witness.

In the dissertation on the Era of Ossian annexed to his poems, Macpherson does not pretend to any thing like proof or evidence of their original date. His statements in prose are as loose and general as his descriptions in poetry. They have neither distinctness nor individuality; they are as intangible as his ghosts, and when you approach them they fall into pieces and vanish away. He speaks of a persecution of the Druids that took place in the days of Fingal, but supports it by no authority; of the Culdees; of the exploits of Fingal when a youth, against Caracul, the king of the world; and of Ossian when an old man, having seen "the Christians whom the persecution under Diocletian had driven beyond the pale of the Roman Empire." All this is mere invention without even the merit of plausibility. He accounts for the absence of religious ideas, by saying that "under the cloud of public hate, all that had any knowledge of the religion of the Druids became extinct, and the nation fell into the last degree of ignorance of their rites and ceremonies." Hence, even the bards, whom he describes as an inferior order of Druids, make no allusion to them in their poems. That a whole people should lose all knowledge of their peculiar religious rites and ceremonies in the course of one generation, is one of the most monstrous suppositions on record. It is also in direct contradiction to the fact, that the bards were the historians of their country. Wherefore should some of the most important topics which employ the pen of history be prohibited or left unnoticed? Whatever reason there might be for

veiling the mysteries of Druidism, while it was the predominant religion, there could be none when it was crushed under the heel of persecution. The veil was then torn in pieces, and we are led by all historical analogy to conclude, that so far from concealing, it would be the object of its enemies to expose it to desecration. Though Druidism has been abolished by Christianity, some striking vestiges of that ancient superstition are extant at the present day. Doctor Graham falls into the same line of argument as Macpherson, and pursues it with more caution, but no better success :

“It would seem,” says he, “that the silence which prevails in these poems with regard to the *higher mysteries* of religion, instead of furnishing an argument against their authenticity, affords a strong presumption of their having been composed at the very time, in the very circumstances, and by the very *persons* to whom they have been attributed. Indeed, had there been any account given in these poems of the secret rites and horrid immolations of the *Beltein* and the *Samhin*, there might have been some ground to question their authenticity.”

We might suppose from the mode in which the learned Doctor speaks of the *higher mysteries*, that the poem contained something relative to the *minor rites* of religion, though equally silent as to them all. Why might not the Celtic poet have described one of the “horrid immolations,” as readily as a Spanish poet might describe an *auto da fe*, or a proselyted inquisitor the tortures of the inquisition? Granting, however, that they were strictly forbidden to speak of immolations and other rites which must have been well known to the whole nation, surely a poet might have borrowed an image from the *Beltein* and *Samhuin* fires, kindled as they were on every mountain, and in every district of the country.\*

\* “Macpherson easily foresaw that this omission of the religious machinery would create mistrust, and unfortunately enhances our suspicion, by a most silly effort to account for it.



Sir John Sinclair, in his dissertation, has brought forward a new argument in support of his favourite hypothesis.\* He affirms that—

“*The existence of Swaran, and other personages mentioned in the poems of Ossian, is authenticated by Danish historians.* With a view of ascertaining this point,” says he, “I applied to the Rev. Mr. Rosing, pastor of the Danish church in London, from whom I received the following particulars, from a work of great authority, namely, Sumh’s History of Denmark.”

This author gives an account of GRAM, a Norwegian prince, who espoused the cause of a princess who was persecuted by a rude suitor, the celebrated Swaran :

“This *Swaran* was the son of *Starno*. He had carried on many wars in Ireland, where he had vanquished most of the heroes that opposed him, except *Cuchullin*, who, assisted by the Gaelic or Caledonian king, *Fingal*, in the present Scotland, not only defeated him, but even took him prisoner, but had the generosity to send him back again to his country ; and these exploits can never be effaced from men’s memory, seeing they are celebrated in the most inimitable manner by the Scotch poet, *Ossian* ; and *Swaran* has thereby obtained an honour which has been denied to so many heroes greater than he. With such an enemy *Gram* was now to contend. They met in single combat, and *Swaran* lost his life.”

The reader of this passage, we doubt not, has formed the same judgment of it as ourselves, that the only authority of the Danish

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‘Before Ossian’s time,’ he tells us, ‘the *Druidic* religion was set aside.’—But he goes on : ‘The power of the *Druids* to elect a *Vergobretus* became hereditary, and the established religion was abolished.’ This is the substance of his long-winded detail of the ruin of the *Druids*. All our remains of ancient history are against him, and what authority does he oppose to their testimony ?—His own ; *his own* only ! Who, ever, before the appearance of this *new historical revelation*, heard of a *Vergobretus* (so called) among the Caledonians ? or, indeed, among any other Celtic people, the *Ædui*, in *Gaul*, alone excepted. It is Cæsar who gives us the name, and describes the office, and that in a corner only of the extensive country he conquered. Had Cæsar never wrote, we should never hear of the name.”—O’Conor’s Dissertation.

\* Sir John Sinclair’s Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian, pp. lxii. lxiii. lxiv.

historian for the name of Swaran and his invasion of Ireland, is Macpherson's Ossian !

If there be any truth in the statement, why are we not referred to known creditable authorities ? No syllable of it is to be found in Torfæus, though he speaks at considerable length, and with fine historical painting, equalling that of poetry, of the invasion of Ireland by certain northern princes, but at a period long subsequent to the days of Ossian ; nor in the Danish histories of king *Eric*, or *Erpold Lindenbruch*. The two latter mention *Gram*, the fifth in the Danish line of kings. Between him and *Frothius hin Fredegode*, the twenty-seventh king, contemporary with Christ, were twenty-one reigns, which, at the moderate allowance of fifteen years to a reign, would make a period of 315 years, so that the interval between him and Fin Mac-Cumhal must have been at least 550 years. The date of *Gram's* reign is not marked, it seems, by Sumh, *in loco* ; but Rosing says, as Sir John Sinclair informs us, that he has elsewhere placed it in 240, whether before or after Christ is not mentioned, but it is intended that we should understand the latter, though the former must unquestionably be nearer the truth.

Some benevolent critic might, perhaps, suggest that Sumh has spoken of a Gram different from him who is mentioned by Eric : but unfortunately for this suggestion, we find but one Danish monarch of that name, and his identity is fixed by the same remarkable fact recorded of him both by Sumh and Eric, namely, that he slew his enemy with sixteen brothers.\* Eric says his enemy was the king of Suecia ; and Sumh calls him *Swaran* on the authority of Macpherson. Thus is one monstrous falsehood made to act reciprocally in support of another. Sumh quotes Macpherson, and Sir

\* "Regem etiam Sueciæ occidit, et sedecim fratres ejus,"—Hist. Gentis Danorum, Erii Daniæ regis. Lug. Elz. 1629, p. 54.

John Sinclair, in support of Macpherson, quotes Sumh. The critic, the historian, and the poet, are worthy of one another. Like the lovers in their impatience to be happy, they invoke the gods to annihilate both space and time. They synchronize names and ages that were separated by an interval of five or six centuries, and the Irish and Danish histories are equally falsified!\*

\* Since the foregoing paragraph was written, we have consulted the Modern Universal History, and found that Gram, fifth king of Denmark, reigned *ante Christum*, 888, so that an interval of not less than *eleven hundred years* occurred between his days and those of Fin Mac-Cumhal! The Viceroy of Gothland in Gram's days was named Swarim, not Swaran. Whether Macpherson took his name Swaran from Danish history, or, as we have conjectured, from Sturan in the Irish poem, let the reader decide. It is of no importance. "Gram discovering that Swarim was conspiring against his life, in order to raise himself to the throne of Sweden, challenged him to single combat, and slew him."—Mod. Un. Hist. vol. xxviii. p. 370.

"In the preface to Macpherson's translation of *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, the *Garve* of his text is called *Swarthan*, which he afterwards changed to *Swaran*, as he did Cuchulaid to Cuthullin."—High. Soc. Rep. App. p. 190, note.

"His account of *Swaran*, king of Lochlyn's invasion of *Ireland*, in the third century, is of a piece with his other assertions; when it is a fact indisputable, that the *Scandinavians*, who obtained the name of *Lochlyns*, made no incursions into Britain and Ireland until the eighth century, not long after the time that their intercourse with the Saxons made them expert navigators. He, however, who could assert proleptically, that *hereditary right* was established lineally among the ancient *Scottish* monarchs, and that minor kings conducted their administration by guardians, could as readily furnish Swaran in the third century, with floating castles spreading their wings of canvas, and threatening destruction to remote nations."—O'Connor's Dissertation.

The author who has been just quoted farther observes, that "the poems of Fingal and Temora, are evidently founded on the romances and vulgar stories of the *Tan-Bo-Cualgney* war and those of *Fiana Ereann*. The poet, whoever he was, picked up many of the names of men and places to be found in those tales, and invention made up the rest. In digesting these poems into the present forms, chronology was overlooked, and the actors of different ages are all made coevals. The *Tan-Bo-Cualgney* war, wherein *Cuchullin*, *Terdia*, *Conall-Cearnach*, *Fergus Mac-Roy*, &c., signalized themselves, was carried on some few years before the commencement of the Christian era. *Fionn Mac-Cumhaill* and the *Fiana Ereann* flourished in the third century. *Mr. Macpherson* or *Ossian* makes them contemporaries."



As for the name Swaran, we believe it to be an alteration of Sturan, a name found in the Irish poem *Laog bhyb-bolbin*, *Bin-Bolbin*. He was the son of *Garav Glunach*, and is described as a powerful enchanter from the east and the regions of cold, who, by the powerful music of his harp, charmed their weapons from the hands of the Fenian heroes:

“Le fuim a éiríte Zang  
Tuit a n-aim ar a lamajb.”

He bore a harp, at whose dread sound,  
Our swords dropp'd harmless to the ground.

Others of Macpherson's names are found in the Fenian tales; but the great source whence he drew, is Toland's History of the Druids. From this history, Laing observes, that “his names and explanations are transcribed verbatim.” That he found his Inishuna there in Inisoen, is pretty apparent, and also his Gelchossa (Ir. *Geal-chos-saigh*.) This last, says Toland, “was a Druidess, and her name is of the Homerial strain, signifying *white-legged*,”\* a strain that would at once arrest the attention of Macpherson, and cause him to transfer it to his own centos. But had he paid the slightest attention to genuine Irish history, and not been obstinately resolved on falsifying it, to favour his own ill-constructed fictions, he would never have resuscitated Cuchullin, after he had been quietly entombed for upwards of two centuries; and changed his country, to make him the contemporary and the compatriot of his Caledonian Achilles! Macpherson, conscious of his own literary crimes, takes every opportunity of vilifying our Irish historians, that by destroying their credibility,

\* Toland's History of the Druids, p. 23.

he may establish his own ; and at the very time he is pilfering names and incidents from their writings, to work into his own heterogeneous tissue of falsehoods, he turns upon them with matchless ingratitude, and accuses them of the very enormities which he is himself committing !

It is justly observed in Charles O'Connor's dissertation, that "the modern sentiments, manners, customs, and allusions they contain, affix them to modern times ; and the ignorance of chronology, geography, and ancient history, shews that *Ossian*, the son of *Fingal*, was in no degree fit to personate OISIN, the son of FIONN, in the description of things to which that prince was coeval. The son of *Fingal*, therefore, lived near our *own times*, and it is best known to Mr. *Macpherson*, whether he is not in the *whole* or in *part*, alive to this day, (1766.) Be it as it may, be he living, dying, or dead ; entire, maimed, or interpolated ; his *Erse* language betrays him, and gives us the land of his nativity with as much precision, as the shadow on *Ahab's* dial did the time of the day ; and pity it is, that the parity does not hold out in the other particular, as the sun of history would in that case go *ten degrees* back on Mr. *Macpherson's* chronological time-plate, to gain poor *Ossian* a long poetical day, and establish a monarchy of *Scots* in *Britain*, five hundred years before it really commenced."

The author intended to give an additional section on *the manners*, and to direct the reader's attention to many revolting incongruities, still farther illustrative of *Macpherson's* forgeries. But after what has been already submitted to consideration, this would surely be superfluous. The incongruities are too numerous and too glaring to escape the observation of the most superficial reader. The wonder is great that *Macpherson* could ever have deceived the reflecting and intelligent ; it would be still greater, should there, at this day, be found an individual of name and character, willing to stand forth as

his advocate. Of all literary impostors, Macpherson has a just claim to precedence. Psalmanazar, who pretended that he had brought a new language from Formosa to Europe, falls far behind him. Chatterton's ascription of the works of his own splendid genius to Rowley, a priest of the fifteenth century, was a comparatively innocent device to arrest public interest. Lauder's attempt to rob Milton of his glory, by the fabrication of Latin verses, which he affirmed the great poet, as a plagiarist, had transferred to his *Paradise Lost*, was sufficiently infamous. But Macpherson, ambitious of being more deeply "damned to everlasting fame," not contented with purloining many of the choicest gems of Irish, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew poetry, falsified the histories of Rome, of Denmark, of Scotland, and above all, of Ireland; and in violation of the laws of time and place, and in defiance of all written documents, dared with matchless effrontery, to give his own crude, unfounded inventions, to the world as authentic history! *Ut quisque est meritis, præmium ferat.*

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NOTE.—Since this Essay was prepared for the Press, a Member of the Royal Irish Academy informed the author, that another work on the same subject has been published by the Rev. Edward Davies, F. R. S. L. This work the author has not seen, nor has he even learned what views Mr. Davies has taken of the subject. If, therefore, the reader of the two works should discover in them any coincidence of thought or of argument, he will consider it as accidental, and remember with Doctor Johnson, that "there are occasions in which all *reasonable* men will think alike."

DUBLIN, May 4, 1830.













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